

## Sufi Orders in Portland Sufism (Islam)

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Those who call themselves Sufis in Portland are a kaleidoscopic mix of observing Muslims, Muslims who are not strictly observant, and those who outright reject any connection between Sufism and Islam. This mix reflects Sufism in the United States as a whole, where Sufism as a form of spirituality has become partially, and in some cases totally, disassociated from Islam. (See Professor Alan Godlas's categorization of Sufis in the United States at <http://www.uga.edu/islam/sufismwest.html>.) Interestingly enough, this disassociation can vary even among those who claim to belong to the same *tariqa* (lineage). This means that even within the Threshold Society (below), for example, there are members who are strict adherents of Islam and those who have not taken and do not plan to take *shahada* (the witnessing of a Muslim that there is one God and Muhammad is His Messenger).

### **Non-Islamic Sufi Orders Associated with the teachings of Hazrat Inayat Khan**

Sufism in Portland traces its origins back to 1910, when Hazrat Inayat Khan traveled throughout the United States, promulgating a universalistic interpretation of Sufism in which all spiritual paths were regarded as equal. Though a devout Muslim himself, much of what he taught focused on the universality of religion and not on Islam. He read and taught from the texts of several religious traditions.

The teachings of Inayat Khan were formalized into two Sufi groups during his travels in the United States. These both fall into the category of non-Islamic Sufi Orders. Neither discusses the Quran, Prophet Muhammad or Islamic religious duties. These two groups are the International Sufi Movement ([www.sufimovement.org](http://www.sufimovement.org)), formed in 1923, and Sufi Order International ([www.sufiorder.org](http://www.sufiorder.org)), headed by Pir Vilayat, the son of Inayat Khan, until his death in 2004. Another man, named Samuel Lewis, also picked up Hazrat Inayat Khan's teachings and formed a community in the San Francisco area, which he institutionalized as the Sufi Islamia Ruhaniat Society (now the Sufi Ruhaniat International; also known as the Dances of Universal Peace) in 1970. Pir Vilayat and Samuel Lewis worked together for a time in the late 1960s. In 1976, however, Pir Vilayat and the followers of Samuel Lewis (d. 1971) had a falling out as a result of a disagreement over the direction the group should take in terms of membership and activities. The group split into Sufi Order of the West (now known as Sufi Order International), and Sufi Islamia Ruhaniat (now known as Sufi Ruhaniat International). Both groups still exist in the Portland area today. Their full profile is not included in this report because neither group claims to belong to the Islamic tradition. Both focus on an unspecified universal spirituality.

### **Quasi-Islamic and Islamic Sufi Orders**

The links below lead to profiles of other Sufi groups in Portland that fall under the categories of quasi-Islamic Sufi Order and Islamic Sufi Order. The Mevlevi Sufi profile discusses two circles, Mevlevi Order of America and the Threshold Society. The former is a non-Islamic Sufi Order, but the latter falls into the quasi-Islamic category, meaning they do not require members to adhere to Islamic practices but they do discuss at least some aspects of the Quran and the traditions of Prophet Muhammad. Similarly, the Nur Ashki Jerrahi circle in Portland is a quasi-Islamic group. The third category of Islamic Sufis is represented through the Shadhiliyya Order, whose official members have taken *shahada* and have accepted the obligation to observe Muslim religious duties.

Mevlevi Sufi Community (profile to be linked)<br><br>

Nur Ashki Jerrahi Order (profile to be linked)<br><br>

Shadhiliyya Order (profile to be linked)<br><br>

### **Interaction of Sufi Orders**

Given that there are no Sufi shaykhs who reside in Portland, members of Sufi orders in Portland are not very well organized nor are they strict adherents of a particular order. Sufi shaykhs and teachers from different orders visit Portland and people from different circles float in and out of their gatherings. As many members of the community say, their practice is much more about what resonates at a given moment than about strict adherence to any one teacher or lineage. Members of the Shadhiliyya order are an exception to this. They strictly adhere to the teachings of their shaykh who resides in Jerusalem and generally avoid mixing with other Sufi groups. Other Sufis attribute this peculiarity of the Shadhiliyya to being a more recent, younger Sufi organization in Portland.

The close interaction between Sufi groups, however, has caused many disputes, hard feelings, and factionalism. As one interviewee put it, "There's been a lot of overlap and crossover. It got to the point where everybody was fishing in each other's ponds until the ponds were fished out. There's a very low level of cooperation now." Indeed, in a community like that associated with the teachings of Rumi, there are a number of splinter circles with very few members each.

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