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*School for Islamic Sufism, Frisco  
photo by Chris Johnson*

## Frisco Welcomes School for Islamic Sufism

By Dr. David Darnell

HAVE YOU NOTICED THE BEAUTIFUL NEW RELIGIOUS EDIFICE recently constructed on Stonebrook Parkway? It's just to the west of the U.S. Post Office, with the name Allah ("God") written in Arabic on the top of its dome. When I first saw it, I thought it was a religious building for some form of Islam, but wasn't sure and really wasn't able to collect my thoughts to determine how I felt about it. But, I was curious, so I went to visit the facility and to learn about it. Certainly, the presence of this new religious building in Frisco is just one more indication of how Frisco is rapidly becoming a microcosm of our modern world.

After my visit and subsequent online research, I learned that the facility is a school for Islam Sufism. According to their website, [www.mtoshahmaghsoudi.org](http://www.mtoshahmaghsoudi.org), sufism "is a discipline, a method and a way that teaches humans how to attain their true state of dignity..." The accurate word for Sufism is *irfan*,

derived from the Arabic word *ma'rifa*, meaning "to cognize" or "to know."

According to William VanDoodeward, author of many

articles on Islam and Sufism, during the eighth and ninth centuries A.D., a new emphasis began to develop within the religion of Islam. This emphasis proposed a search for deeper meaning that began with a pietistic asceticism, which in turn led to the development of the popular "mystical side of Islam" - known as *tasawwuf* or Sufism.

Apparently, *tasawwuf* is an acronym made up of the four consonant letters: t, s, w, and f.

- "t" stands for *tawbah*, meaning repentance
- "s" stands for *safa*, purity, peace and joy
- "w" stands for *wilayah*, the sanctity of the lovers and friends of Allah
- "f" stands for *fana*, the annihilation of self into the nothingness.

[from 'The Secret of Secrets' by Hadhrat Abdul Qadir Jilani (raa)]

This Frisco facility was established to teach not only the religion of Islam, but also a process by which the schools'

students can learn *tasawwuf*.

Unfortunately, not everyone is comfortable with such an organization in Frisco. Just at the sight of the building, someone is quoted as asking, "What are they building that Mosque [here] for?" When I heard that, I wondered, "Are we going to treat people from other religions in the same way the radical Muslim extremists are treating the Christians and their churches in Iraq and Pakistan? As Americans, surely there's a better way?"

Mark 9 tells the story of Jesus' "transfiguration" (change in appearance) on a mountaintop, talking with Elijah and Moses. Peter didn't know what to say, but hurriedly made the proposal that the disciples should build three huts out of leafy branches (such as Jews built for the Festival of Booths), to honor all three of them—Jesus, Elijah and Moses.

It was an "ecumenical" type of proposal, one that sounds very good to many religious leaders today who are suddenly being thrust into the reality of world religions surrounding them.

But, how shall we deal with our religious neighbors today? Mark's Gospel rejects an easy solution, but I believe such an ecumenical approach can help with our new neighbors

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teaching Islamic Sufism.

Instead of immediately isolating them, we should get to know our new neighbors, and listen carefully to their convictions, comparing and contrasting them with our own. How do we dare to claim they are all the same, when we know so little about them? But open, honest dialogue does not mean that either they or we have to drop, or minimize our own cherished convictions or beliefs. The fact is, when we openly share with our religious neighbors, and examine their beliefs, much light is shed on our own religion, and our beliefs—light that we would not get apart from such open discussion.

The solution will not be found in easy compromise, but in the way of honest dialogue and growth through learning and understanding one another. This will be, I believe, the road to the future in the 21st century. It is the best alternative, both here in America, and throughout the world, especially in the Middle East. The way of violent confrontation has never worked—whether in the Christian “Crusades” in the Middle East, or in the Muslim “Jihads” of the present. Fortunately, as Americans, our religion is a matter of choice, belief, faith and conviction.

So what shall we do about the new religious school for Islamic Sufism here in Frisco? Let our religious leaders be the first to go and meet and welcome this new religious community. Truth has nothing to fear in honest dialogue.

So, while we may agree or disagree with the suppositions of Islam Sufism, we can all agree with the right of the organizers to come to Frisco and establish such a local organization. And, we can all be thankful we live in a country founded with such freedom.

To our new friends at the School for Islamic Sufism: Welcome to Frisco.

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*Dr. David Darnell is the Minister and Scholar in Residence for the Central Christian Church on East Main Street in Frisco.*

The logo for Frisco Style Magazine features a red square on the left containing the stylized white letters 'FSM'. To the right of the square, the word 'frisco' is written in a white, lowercase, cursive font. Below 'frisco', the words 'STYLE' and 'MAGAZINE' are stacked in a large, black, uppercase, serif font.

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