

Reviving the *Suffa* Tradition

by Rifat Atay

In Islamic history, one of the most intriguing questions has been the termination of the *Suffa* School immediately following the Prophet's demise. As is well known, the *Suffa* Companions were comprised of mostly single young men who did not have anywhere else to go to. They were provided with shelter and food in the Prophet's Mosque in Medina. Their sole occupation was to spend all their time with the Prophet, learning and studying. They became so well versed in Islam that most of them were sent as teachers and/or governors to new provinces.

The paper claims that today Gülen is seeking to revive the *Suffa* tradition in two ways. First, by resembling the first *Suffa* Companions himself. The four guiding principles traced in the lives of the *Suffa* Companions (single, simple, humble and pious) can be found in the daily life of Gülen. Thus, this paper suggests that Gülen is often mistaken as a Sufi when in fact he can be considered a member of the *Suffa*. Secondly, Gülen has been consistently providing personal tutelage over the last two decades to hundreds of theology graduate students. Students gain admission to Gülen's informal school by passing a rigorous exam in Islamic sciences and Arabic. Thereafter awaits them extensive study and an ascetic lifestyle. Students can remain as long as they wish, some for even as long as ten years. Gülen has been known to have had up to 40 students at times, although given his ill-health this number has dropped to 15 in recent years. In their lifestyle, daily programme and efforts post 'graduation' these students resemble the first *Suffa* Companions.

Panel:
Ethics, Universal Values
and Pluralism in Gülen's
Thought

Venue:
Old Theatre,
LSE

27.10.07 Panels	Parell Session 1	Parell Session 2
9:30-11:30		
13:00-15:00	Presentation: 08	
15:10-17:00		

Rifat Atay (PhD on John Hick's religious pluralism, St Mary's College, St Andrew's University, Scotland, 1999): Assistant Professor of the Philosophy of Religion at the University of Harran, Sanliurfa, Turkey. He participated in several international and national projects by contributing articles on *Rumi, Islam and din* (religion) and papers on the Islamic perceptions of other religions. His most recent publication: *Rumi Readings from the Perspective of Religious Pluralism: An Analysis* (2006), and *The Prophetic Heir Rumi: An Essay in Humanistic Love-centred Pluralist Reading* (2007), both in Turkish. His main research interests are religious pluralism, interreligious dialogue, Rumi studies, literature and philosophy, cinema and theology and philosophy through poetry.

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