Suggestions and guidelines for Inclusivity and Diversity in the SRI

We are working here on the cutting edge to open our Path of the Heart to be more conscious and more inclusive. Some research done on the internet shows that few (if any) Sufi Communities are busying themselves with this openness which is surely a significant part of our work...”Toward the One”, “La illaha ilAllah HU”, ... including everyone and everything and not excluding anyone or anything. If anyone it would seem that our Buddhist Sisters and Brothers are leading the way in Inclusivity.

1. Looking at our overarching aims and vision “Toward the One” it seems essential that we review the wording of our ethical goal. Currently it states: “To cherish all, regardless of race, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, ability, national origin, or marital status.”

   **Suggestion:** “We cherish all beings, it is our intention is to create a safe and inclusive space (haven?) at our meetings, retreats and camps, where all people of every age, ethnicity, cultural heritage and religious background, socio-economic group, ability, sexual orientation and gender identity are welcome and cherished. It is our aim to embody respect for all beings and the inherent dignity of all beings, including our precious planet.”

2. 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? We may start off at a disadvantage here, as we can’t see or understand what we don’t know ... and an open and enquiring mind, that evaluates our circles and meetings will (Insh’Allah) begin to notice who is not in our circle? And to enquire as to how we can be more open and available.
3. Through this work we will cultivate our Adab and Khatir. “A respectful attitude is the first and principle thing in the development of personality.” Hazrat Inayat Khan ¹
“The highest expression of love is respect.”² Hazrat Inayat Khan
“Khatir means consideration for someone which is shown in the form of respect, help or service... for a Sufi this quality becomes their moral.”³

**General aim – 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. Raising consciousness and awareness of the necessity of Inclusion. This is our core business as people heading (Insh’Allah) ‘Toward the One’. As we do this raising of our awareness, we will surely become more comfortable with our own quirks and areas of discomfort. This is a basic message of inclusion which is about ALL OF US, and all of our inner and outer family. In Soulwork terms our inner family will also 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.

2. 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.

3. We need to look at our overarching vision and aims and work out a strategy to be truly more inclusive. 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

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¹ The Wisdom of Sufism - Hazrat Inayat Khan III.3(Element books, Shaftesbury, Dorset 2000)
² Ibid III.4
³ Ibid III.6
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 and we are part of that whole.

Recommendations
1. That the subject of Inclusion be regularly revisited at all levels of our community from Murshid’s Council to individual leaders and circles.
3. Consider making resource videos on Inclusivity, on ‘how to’ and on the importance of this work to be posted on the website, to be recommended viewing for all Guides and Dance Leaders.
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. Review our communications and ensure that they contain an all inclusive message; i.e. 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.”)
6. Minimise, as far as possible barriers to participating in events and retreats.
7. Use inclusive spaces, always visit and assess the space before organizing anything, where possible take a person with physical challenges with you.
8. 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 up-front about what we can offer. (For
example from Insight Meditation Society (US) “If you have a disability or chronic health issue, it is extremely important to let the Retreat Center or Forest Refuge office know as soon as you are considering registering or applying for a retreat, so that we can discuss how retreat life may impact you, and the level of support that we can realistically offer. As a religious institution, IMS is exempt from certain ADA mandates, but we nevertheless strive to do our best to meet our needs.”

9. 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?

10. Be aware of the building we are using to gather in... is it an open space for everyone? In Europe there are not so many 'Unitarian' facilities. If we hold meetings in overtly Christian buildings, we need not be surprised that not many people of others faith attend.

11. Make sure where possible at retreats and camps that all participants are catered for, there are various ways around different diets. (Separate pans for the vegetarian sauce, meat, or various sauces with milk or without etc.. this to be done within the limits of each circle, being as inclusive as is possible) Endeavour to keep the price equal for all, no ‘fine’ or ‘penalty’ for having special needs/food allergies.

12. Raise awareness among your groups that if people chat in a small breathing space between one dance and the next or one practice and the next it, could be that this means that a person near you can no longer understand what is being said. The same for visual connection. We can encourage our participants to be aware of how your behaviour may affect someone else. Hold the focus, the concentration of the practice/mantra between Dances/Practices.

13. Enquire (regularly) as to what people’s physical needs are? And find out whether you can cater to them or not.

14. 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.
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 laws are about accessibility for people with physical challenges. And enquire what facilities are available for such people and to encourage inclusivity.

16. Have a 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.

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. Will we make Inclusion groups, with ZOOM meetings where the opportunities and challenges can be discussed?
5. Will we make this an integral part of the work for our Jamiat Khas meetings?
6. And how will we reach the teachers/guides who are not able to attend JK and maybe not watching the videos?