



## Brunch December 2012

*Dear Friends,*

Following the cheerful Thanksgiving dinner with all the trimmings at 1740 Washington in November, December continued in the holiday spirit. Despite the cold and the snow, everyone pitched in and delicious, hot meals were enjoyed by all. For the first meal of the month, Yasin and Mary prepared couscous with tender goat meat. It proved to be a real hit—it was all consumed on site!



*Volunteers serve a home-cooked meal with salad and fruit.*

The greatest highlight for December was for the holiday party on the Sunday before Christmas. On this particular Sunday, volunteers from other parts of the country, as well as Canada, had come to visit House of Sufism upon Master's visit that weekend. Some graciously volunteered to join us and serve the feast to our friends at 1740. As always, it was beautiful to see so many different people come together with one simple goal. Given the great diversity of the residents of 1740, the members as well as friends of House of Sufism, and the volunteers from other organizations that join us, the harmony is sometimes surprising. Despite the differences in background, nationality, and religion, there is always a pleasant, jovial atmosphere when we serve breakfast and lunch. Volunteers are always joking around with the residents, and it seems that the residents really appreciate our weekly presence. This was especially true this month; the warmth and joy of friendship erased any stress or chill from the weather.

Of course, a true celebration has not just friends, but also a feast! More than enough food was prepared for the grand festivities: of a giant bowl of beef chili, an enormous bin of salad, mounds of fragrant Persian rice, juices, milk, and coffee. We were graced by a visit by Master Alireza Nurbakhsh who joined in the festivities. Also among us were Zaid and Vera who were married by Master the night before. The mood was truly festive and perfectly captured the holiday spirit; the presence was warm and loving while we broke bread.

### *How to Get Involved*

1. **Volunteer:** 2-4pm every Sunday. Help us cook and clean or just by spending time with our friends.
2. **Monetary Donations:** If you would like to make a contribution to the House of Sufism Charity Initiative, you can write a check (payable to KN), use any credit card, or wire money through PayPal. All your donations are tax deductible.



*Master and many friends gathering after the meal.*

## *The Most Pressing Needs of OUR COMMUNITY*

We are often troubled by global problems, such as natural disasters, genocide, and political instability. People across the world are suffering and require urgent care. Most do not receive it. The Sufi approach to humanitarian aid is “think globally, act locally.” We must view our own actions and experiences here in the broad context of an unjust world. On television and in the news, we see images of starving children in other countries; this is one face of hunger, but not the only one. It is important that we do not grow too accustomed to these images of suffering. The shock on which this trope relies has two effects, perhaps flip sides of the same coin: we feel alienated from “suffering”, despite all knowing some degree of hunger, sorrow, and poor health, and we feel that this “suffering” cannot happen near us because it does not fit into our view of daily life. If one considered only these images of pain we see constantly, it would seem that true starvation only occurs in war-torn, impoverished dictatorships, but that is obviously untrue. The United States is home to the hungry, although that does not fit into the framework of exotified suffering necessary to fuel popular ‘do-goodism’. In this light, the statistics on hunger and homelessness in America are shocking. In 2010, over 17 million households in the US lacked reliable, consistent food sources, despite the US’s status as the wealthiest country in the world. About four million of these households include children. One study found that almost 1.6 million individuals in our country experienced some homelessness over a year, between 2009 and 2010. An additional 1.5 million children were homeless.

Homelessness is an expensive social issue, partially due to funding for emergency rooms, shelters, and public safety; permanent supportive housing can save up to \$10,000 per person per year. Once these individuals have a permanent home with supportive services, their lives become more stable. Their need for expensive state-funded emergency services goes down dramatically and their health improves. It is clear that improving the health and wellness of the homeless is an individual one. They are threatened by a social structure that does not allow them legal representation or low-income housing.

Anyone walking down the street can tell you that homelessness is a problem in Boston. According to greater Boston, every year 200 frozen bodies to hospitals, where many are declared dead. Homeless people die at rates far higher than the rest of us. The homeless are the poorest and most vulnerable of our neighbors. Hunger is a problem for many, but among the homeless population, the need becomes more dire. They have already lost their jobs, houses, clothes, et cetera. Almost all are in poor health, both emotionally and physically. Many have lost contact with their families. In 2006, there were over 6,000 individuals, including children, on the street or in a temporary shelter on any given night. Since the recession, the problem has increased. How can we ignore such suffering in walking distance from our own homes?

The Sufi approach to these problems is to view the local problems in light of the global ones. We must identify the most pressing needs of our own community and work to alleviate those. Strengthening our own communities is a precursor to improving life in other countries. In Persian culture, it is said that if there is only one candle left, use it to light the home, not the mosque. This is a universal idea; we see it in our own everyday actions, such as buying products made locally or nationally instead of products made outside the country. The author, activist, and feminist Grace Lee Boggs wrote, “We can begin by doing small things at the local level, like planting community gardens or looking out for our neighbors. That is how change takes place in living systems, not from above but from within, from many local actions occurring simultaneously.” Just as Boggs writes “not from above but from within”, we act not “from there, but from here”. We must protect and help our families and neighbors first.

Those of us who have visited 1740 Washington Street realize the impact we can have as individuals on the lives of our neighbors. In that building, we have 31 friends, and our support is just one element of their care. They receive comprehensive support, including legal and medical attention. In addition to this, we provide them with weekly meals, birthday parties, holiday gifts, clothes, veteran support, gym memberships to counter obesity and other health problems, conversation, and emotional connections. Our work at 1740 Washington is just one facet of the effort to alleviate suffering, but it is an important one.



*For entertainment, residents play bingo after lunch.*

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