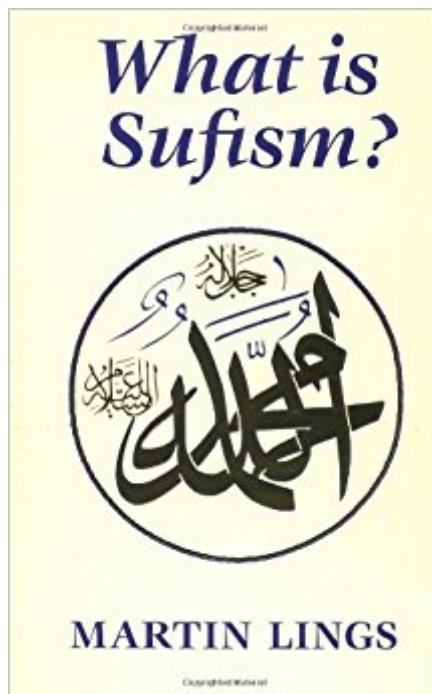


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What Is Sufism? (Islamic Texts Society)



Synopsis

Martin Lings provides an excellent and authoritative introduction to the mystical movement of the Sufis based on his lifelong interest in Islamic culture. His explanation derives from a profound understanding of Sufism, and extends to many aspects which are usually neglected. His illuminating answer to 'What is Sufism?' gives a taste of the very subject matter itself. What do Sufis believe? What do they aim at? What do they do? Unlike other writers on the subject, Martin Lings treats all the three questions with equal justice. He is thus able to give a wealth of answers to the main question 'What is Sufism?', each answer being from a different angle but all going to the root of the matter. A reviewer wrote 'Should the book appear in paperback, I would use it for undergraduate and graduate courses on Islamic civilization', and in fact *What is Sufism?* has become a set book in colleges and universities on both sides of the Atlantic. It is now accepted as the authoritative statement on the subject of Sufism and it has been translated into French, German, Italian and Spanish. It has also been published in Sarajevo in Bosnian, and is available in Braille.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"An invaluable contribution to the study of the subject and may well become a standard textbook . . . Highly recommended." -- Choice "The mood of Sufism is conveyed ... with a clarity that is rare, even unique ... done in a responsible, non-proselytizing manner." -- Review of Books and Religion 'The discussion of Sufi aims, psychology, doctrine and method is original (many previously untranslated texts are cited), sensitive and readable. The mood of Sufism is conveyed here with a clarity that is rare, even unique, yet it is done in a responsible, non-proselytizing manner.' -- Review of Books and

Religion

Martin Lings, formerly Keeper of Oriental Manuscripts in the British Museum and the British Library, is the author of two works on Islamic mysticism, 'The Book of Certainty' and 'A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century', both published by the Islamic Texts Society. His 'Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources', also published by the Islamic Texts Society, has been internationally acclaimed as a masterpiece.

Although the cover practically looks like an "I Can Read Book," this is not a beginner's book. Martin Lings, a great scholar and Sufi, has written a beautiful and deeply esoteric work that explores the Sufi lineage, keeping it within its bounds and place in Islam. The original Sufi, no doubt, was Muhammad ﷺ. As is stated, "Sufism today is a name without a reality that was once a reality without a name." It is simply the esoteric, the inner kernel of Islam. The problem with creating names/ideas around the idea of "Sufism" is that it immediately polarizes and creates divisions. That is not the intent of original sufi's, who were simply the mystics (including Muhammad ﷺ, Al-ibn Abi 'Ubayda, Al-ibn 'Abd al-Rahman and others who are well quoted in making very "Sufi" statements about union, oneness of being, etc.) well before there was ever a name associated with their devotional philosophies. This book does a beautiful job of keeping the reality of Sufism firmly anchored in the lineage of Islam, maintaining the importance of exoteric Islamic practices, all while exploring different thoughts, ideas and figures of its deeply meaningful history.

I had done quite a bit of research on Sufism for a few courses and I have found Lings' little book to be absolutely remarkable. First, it is important to note that Lings writes from the perspective of Sufism, so he casually brushes aside orthodox readings in favor of spiritual or "vertical" readings of the Qur'an. This makes for quite easy comparison with other forms of Mysticism, but I feel at times this isn't a very true approach. To be more honest with the tradition, Sufism qua Islam would be more appropriate. But, due to my own biases, Sufism qua Mysticism makes for a far more universal, comparative study. Keep this bias in mind before reading. The book itself concisely covers all that one could ask for in a book this size. Lings' ability to be terse yet illuminating is legendary here. This seems to come from the power of his summations where he ties up his thoughts and makes very definite statements about the philosophy and implications of Sufism. These tend to come across as

both inspirational and brilliant. Also, he splices citations into his reading effortlessly and poignantly which makes for great direction for further study. If you have a mystic bias this book will certainly deliver. Even if you do not, Lings' understanding of the material is still unmistakable.

I was told this book was like NEW. Almost every page is marked in pen, underlined in pen, some markings are highlighted in one some are highlighted in multi color highlighter pens. Name of the person or sales clerk is Amanda Torres, and the PRODUCT CONDITION she notes is VERY GOOD! This seems ironic and even more galling!

I found this to be the best book that I have read so far that introduces the theoretical and practical concepts of Sufism. The author makes Sufism intellectually appealing. I especially like how Mr. Lings discusses the concept of 'wahid al wujud' or 'unity of existence.' That is very important to know when understand the 'world view' of Sufism. I believe books like these can help introduce Islam western educated audiences unlike the many books that talk about Islam as if it was a bunch of laws and nothing more. The Reviewer's comments below were totally misleading and show complete ignorance of Islam. There are authentic hadiths that make references to the higher states for example. Sufism is a very Islamic concept that was recognized by all 4 of the great imams (3 of which are mentioned) Shafi, Malik, Ahmad, Hanafi. Sufism was also recognized as valid by ibn Tamiyyah himself. ibn Tamiyyah was a shaykh in the Qadiri tariqat. Shaykh Ghazzali was not credited with being the "founder of Sufism." He however standardized and made it popular with his tremendous influence. There is absolutely no proof that he changed any of his ideas. At the end of his life he moved to Palestine and totally put aside public life. He made no writings or speeches at all then. There are many mystical stories from the region today about his last years there. Also Islam DOES recognize sainthood. Even ibn Tamiyyah recognized it. ibn Tamiyyah was a controversial scholar and labelled heretical by mainstream Sunni Islam. This critic's views reflect that of the Wahabi fundamentalists who dumb down religion and show extreme intolerance to others.

This is a very well researched and written introduction to the Islamic science of tassawuf--which is the Arabic word usually translated as Sufism. As Dr. Lings shows--and he later converted to Islam as Dr. Abu Bakr Siraj ud Deen--Sufism is an integral part of Islam; a part which has always been accepted as the heart of Islam. As a famous Sufi [Islamic saint who has reached the highest spiritual station] once said, "Shariat is the body and tariqat [another name for Sufism] is the soul". This book looks at the origins of Sufism, its historical development, its branching into various

brotherhoods, its importance in Islamic history as well as the various aspects of sufi methodology and worship. Most importantly, this book puts Sufism where it belongs: at the heart of Islam and it shows that Sufism is not, as some have argued, extraneous to the Islamic belief. In other words, though it has some similarities with other mystical aspects of other religions, it is totally a product of Islam and its orthodox teachings. There is no such thing as a non-Muslim Sufi. This book is thus a superb introduction to the inner-mystical-aspects of Islamic worship and the best one i've seen so far in English for the beginner. Highly recommended.

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