



Sufism: A Short Introduction

William C. Chittick

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William C. Chittick, the leading scholar in the field, offers a compelling insight into the origins, context, and key themes of this fascinating movement. He draws upon the words of some of the greatest Sufi writers to give a fresh and revealing perspective on the teachings and beliefs of Sufism and its proponents. This fresh and authoritative book will be appreciated by anyone interested in Sufism, from complete beginners to students, scholars, and experts alike.

Sufism: A Short Introduction Details

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From Reader Review Sufism: A Short Introduction for online ebook

Zeeshan Fatima says

An excellent book for anyone looking forward to familiarizing them with the fundamentals of Sufism. A must read for beginners indeed.

Pedram says

Alex Rhea says

A very good and thorough introduction to Sufism from an academic and not new age perspective.

Saalikah van Minangkabau says

Numerous books on Sufism have been written by muslims and non-muslims alike, but only a handful provides accurate insights into the beliefs and practices of sufis as sufis see them. Chittick's book is one of those rare few.

Trying to distance himself from the investigative style of modern scholars who "have employed diverse interpretative schemes in their attempts to make sense of Islamic history in contemporary terms" (p. 8), Chittick presents sufi's worldview using sufi own terms and categories, and thus gives us an insiders' view, a rare treat in the era of crusade to "liberate Islam."

Written in simple English in ten short chapters, this compact book gives reader a tour on various aspects of Sufism. Among others, Chittick presents the Islamic basis of Sufism (Sufism is an expression of Ihsan, the deepest level of Islam),

the covenant that binds human soul to the Beloved (the famous "Alasto bi robbikum?" verse), practices of remembrance (dhikr), and -most beautifully- the experiential stages of a Sufi path as expressed by Baha Walad and Rumi.

Chittick's strength lies in his ability to present original texts to speak for themselves. As any translators would know, this is no simple task.

"The Remembrance of God" (dhikr) is one chapter that will give readers a sense of basic practices in Sufism. The Trust that the soul made with the Beloved bound the former to keep remembering Him, The Real (Haqq), and to see "that there is nothing truly real but the Real." (p.53) Here Chittick stresses that to understand God Islamically, one should go back to Islamic sources to see how He made Himself known to His creation through the Qur'an. Dhikr is central in the Qur'an and Hadith, and Sufis are distinguished from other muslims in the way they exercise dhikr (and awrads or litanies) instructed by their Syaikhs as compulsory daily practice. Chittick cites the words of Khawja Muhammad Parsa (a Naqshbandi syaikh in 15th C), Imam Ghazali, Ibn Ata'illah (A Shadiliyya syaikh who writes, "No one says No god but God correctly unless he negates everything other than God from his soul and heart"), Nuri, Najm ad-Din Razi, Sa'di, and also Rabi'a (al Adawiya) to point out the centrality of dhikr among Sufis.

Chittick's chapter on "The Way of Love" is a delightful treat to those who like Sufi poetry and Sufi discourses on Love (with capital L). One discourse by Rumi that yours truly find most striking is the following, "All the hopes, desires, loves, and affections that people have for different things... all these are desires for God, and these things are veils. When people leave this world and see the Eternal King without these veils, then they will know that all these were veils and the object of their desire was in reality that One Thing..."

Other chapters are equally compelling, most specifically one on the "Images of Beatitude." Due to limited space, it is not covered here.

For such a compact book, Chittick's book is a solid introduction to Sufism because it allows the original sources to speak for themselves and because it takes the pain to explain Sufi own categories and terms rather than using alien concepts that simplify (and co-opt) Sufistic experience. In the world of the dominant liberal-secular scholarship on Islam, Chittick's book is a rare treat.

Barnaby Thieme says

William Chittick provides a useful insider's perspective on Sufism. As an apparent Sufi himself, Chittick doesn't ask the questions that to me, as an outsider, appear both obvious and pressing. He observes, for example, that "Many Sufis read the Koran as a love letter from their Beloved, so they may interpret it in the best of lights, even if the Beloved sometimes utters harsh words in His concern to wake up their hearts." (p. 142)

Oh, is that what is occurring when the Koran enjoins men to beat their rebellious women? (Kor 4:38)

There are some obvious facts of the matter that are not being accounted for.

Chittick does not maintain a critical stance with respect to the esoteric readings that Sufism provides on Islamic scripture. He returns many times to the foundational argument that the cardinal Islamic doctrine "There is no god but Allah," has a metaphysical sense, by which it means that nothing exists other than Allah, and what appears to be other than Allah or apart from Allah is an error of the understanding. This is an interesting reinterpretation of the doctrine, and clearly is one of countless examples in which many religious traditions advance in their understanding while attempting to remain grounded, in theory at least, in the original teaching, through the strategy of a putative interpretation. But if you do not recognize that there is an innovation here - a new reading that passes beyond the original sense of the doctrine - then you're missing something rather obvious about the whole picture.

Chittick does not show much interest in non-Islamic sources. The influence of the Greek Neoplatonist Plotinus on medieval Muslim thought, by way of the apocryphal "Theologia" of pseudo-Aristotle, is profound and ubiquitous, and leaves its mark everywhere on Sufi discourse in its early centuries. It receives not a mention here.

I felt a weird double-bind in this book that I often encounter with expositors of Muslim thought. Critics of the tradition, and purveyors of other points of view within it, are subjected to careful scrutiny and meticulous analysis. But the tradition represented by the author passes untested by the same bitter reagents that scorched the arguments of Jurists and Orientalists.

Despite these significant caveats, and despite the pervasive uneasy feeling that accompanied me through this book, led by so credulous and loyal a guide, Chittick is a formidable scholar, and this book is useful overview of some of the high-points of this fascinating and misunderstood tradition.

When the book turns from legitimating Sufism in Islam, or from legitimating Islam among religions, the various authors and saints are freed to be the wanderers and mystics they are, more at home in that universal cohort of sensitives who enjoin a personal relationship with the divine through the renunciation of the self, than in their own home tradition. The words of their philosophy, and especially their poems, inspire the reader to lofty heights. And if the perennial philosophy sometimes feels shoehorned into the religious imagination of Islam, with its many small boxes and its constant threats of chastisement, well, so much the better, to illustrate the resilience of human spiritual insight, that can bear fruit even in rocky turf.

asra says

Chittick is brilliant. I have not, until now, read an introduction on Sufism that was appropriate for both my enthusiasm and ignorance of the topic. Sufism is something to be felt, which explains why so many Sufi writings are in the form of prose and poetry. But there is something to be said for wanting to understand a little bit about the journey before embarking on it. In my experience, books that have attempted to describe Sufism have left me wanting. But enter Dr. Chittick. He is a teacher who knows his audience and what/how to communicate to the novice. For me, he has produced a manageable text that cracks the door open to allow a slight glimpse of the lights and veils he so often discusses in his book. It's a text to be read over, and combined with Ibn Ata'Ilah's "Book of Wisdom," provides a starting point for any wayfarer hoping to make sense of the world (within and without).

Muge Pirgaip says

"Bütün putlar?n anas? kendi nefsindir" Rumi,
Kitaptan: " 'Normal' insani durum, unutkanl?k ve gaflet durumudur. ?nsani mükemmel?in en ba?ta gelen ?art? kendi eksikli?ini tan?mak ve tek Gerçeklik'in mükemmel?ini hat?rda tutmakt?r. Hakk'? tam olarak hat?rlamak için, sâlikin gerçekd???n? unutmas? gerekir, bu kendi nefsinin ve dünyan?n bat? yönüdür. "

Talat says

Like my students, I found Chittick's introduction to Sufism captivating, compelling, immediate, and relevant to everyday life. Chittick scales the heights of metaphysical Sufism, penetrates the heart of the path of love, and very securely grounds Sufism as the integral dimension of the Islamic tradition that it is. Like, Chittick and Sachiko Murata's "Vision of Islam," the book follows an outline from a classical and widely accepted sound "hadith of Gabriel" that identifies three dimensions of Islam: Islamic practice (expressed in Shari' a); Iman (Faith, expressed in theology); and Ihsan, (doing the beautiful). Chittick explains both the Islamic theory of the manifestation of appearances as either "signs" (of God) or "veils," treats the subject of the divine names with finesse, and crystalizes Ahmad Sam'ani's stunningly simple theory of the necessity of Adam's fall. This book is also filled with excellent translations of Rumi and Ibn 'Arabi. "There is no lover and no beloved but God." (Ibn 'Arabi, p. 80) "You are your thought brother, the rest of you is bones and fiber. If you think of roses, you are a rose garden, if you think of thorns, you're fuel for the furnace." (Rumi, on p. 20).

Zubair says

Good but not great- i think the book lost focus on second half, got too detailed.
But overall great introduction- being my first book on this topic.
And his writing style is so good that its pleasure to read him.

Kaash says

i think its would be so amazing book and i want to read this book

