



The Vision of Islam

William C. Chittick , Sachiko Murata

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Covering the four dimensions of Islam as outlined in the Hadith of Gabriel--practice, faith, spirituality, and the Islamic view of history--The Vision of Islam draws on the Koran, the sayings of the Prophet and the great authorities of the tradition. This clearly written book introduces the essentials of each dimension and then shows how each has been embodied in Islamic institutions throughout history.

The Vision of Islam Details

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From Reader Review The Vision of Islam for online ebook

Ayman Saeed says

Amazing introduction to the philosophical underpinnings behind one of the world's most recognized religions. It does a fantastic job not only in displaying the diversity of thought that informs Islamic doctrine and faith; but also in clarifying critical philosophical concepts that most people, both non Muslim and Muslim alike, have misunderstood or forgotten when attempting to understand the faith. A very easy yet highly enlightening read.

Homa says

Funny how I took the class last year, but am reading it now...hmm...

Nur Banu Simsek says

Sufi favoritism aside, Chittick and Murata do a good job of covering the basic theological tenets of Islam and critiquing the modern problems in thought and scholarship of the religion.

Sarah says

Given the majestic breadth of this book and how deep it delves into Islamic spiritual philosophy, I can't presume to 'review' it as I'm nowhere near qualified enough. I can't say I 'love' it, because it just is. It's my spiritual reference. It's my Muslim way of keeping it Real.

(Still, five stars aren't enough.)

Imran Nasrullah says

A terrific book I read in conjunction with Muhammad Asad's translation of the Quran. The book added a nuanced understanding to my reading of and comprehension of Quran. I read this many years ago, and will re-read this book again.

Tim says

Past all the modern incarnations of viewpoints on Islam, whether they come from inside the religion or outside, from fundamentalists or the esoterically minded, from atheists or those who have a conception of the Real, this book is a noble effort to delineate the deepest meanings of Islam as it was meant to be understood.

To do this, the authors dive into the intellectual and spiritual history of the faith, leaving out no major area: The Qur'an, Hadith, Shariah, Sufism, philosophy, Sunni/Shia, the universality of divine revelation, etc...

Sachiko Murata and William Chittick are a wife and husband team who teach Islamic studies at the State University of New York. Sachiko was the first woman to ever study fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) at the University of Tehran. This multi-gender viewpoint on the Islamic faith only adds to the deep richness of this introductory work.

What the authors have accomplished here is a holistic viewpoint that nevertheless is able to expand greatly on Islam as lived experience. This is not a dry academic exercise that simply lists essentials of faith, but successfully attempts to portray what it means to live life as a Muslim, using the principle that the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) himself lived out in the pursuit of knowledge. *"The search for knowledge is incumbent upon every Muslim"* (34). To do this, the authors set up a framework that expands on the three dimensions of Islam - *islam* (submission), *iman* (faith), and *ihsan* (doing what is beautiful) (31). The oneness (or *Tawhid*) that is central to the Islamic path takes position as a primary vantage point with which to view these three dimensions. Within *Tawhid*, there is a duality that is experienced in human cognition through seeing similarity in the Real at the same time that differentiation is realized. This tension is expressed in the terms *tanzih* (declaring incomparability) and *tashbih* (affirming similarity). Underlying these two terms is the idea that things are known through their opposites.

The various dimensions of Islam and the emphasis on exoteric vs. esoteric are seen through the corresponding emphasis on *tanzih* or *tashbih*. For example, the exoteric laws (Shariah), with emphasis on the lived bodily actions of Muslims in the world will focus on our dissimilarity to the Real, which requires divine guidance in daily life. The esoteric concepts of the Sufis see all as the Real and therefore seek through the totality of Islam to eliminate the veils which blind us to the truth that is a manifestation of the universal essence.

Murata and Chittick spend a great deal of time on the concept of beauty and how doing what is beautiful (*ihsan*) is the greatest achievement for a Muslim. The practice of the beautiful is explained through the corresponding realization of the divine attributes in lived experience. These attributes come directly from the Qur'an through the 99 beautiful names of God. *The Prophet said, "God is beautiful, and He loves beauty."* (212)

The book is ultimately a wonderful summary of Islam and what it means to be a Muslim. It is not a review of how Muslims live in the context of modern or post-modern conditions, it is a return to the deepest truths of the faith. For that reason, it has my deepest recommendation as a path to understanding, particularly for those in the West to gain a true vision of what Islam means, and for all of us as Muslims to gain a holistic grounding in the universal truths of our faith.

Shamsa says

It was mind blowing and spiritually satisfying. I was surprised to see myself so unaware of my own religion as opposed to the authors. I gained a lot of fresh perspective and alhamdulillah a revival of faith. In summary, it is Islam, Iman and Ihsan explained in a way never imagined. There are so many gems in this book worth quoting. It makes you want to read it again to uncover the gems or perhaps reignite the analytical engine within. It makes you think and think hard. I wish I could take their course.

Hatem Aly says

just to be fair I didn't "read" the book, I listened to a reading of it with commentary by Hamza Yusuf..
I'll update my review once I "read" it though..soon enough I hope

?Ism???I says

Chittick and Murata make up for the denseness of this book with lucidity if reading as a beginner. Very little introductory Islamic books in English today of this standard exist that appeals to Western academia and traditional Islam. It is written from a traditional approach with emphasis on Quran and hadith for a Western audience in an sincere effort to summarize Islam. The authors delve deep into the three dimensions of the religion framing the book around the famous hadith of Gabriel spending the majority of the book expounding on the tenets of faith (imaan).

Certain passages were highly absorbing that after much deliberate reading and pondering I found myself, at times, noticing almost an hour go by without getting past a few pages. A Muslim with a decent background knowledge of Islam will find more than a simple introductory work here, and the blurb on the back makes fair warning of this. Think of this book as an introductory book on traditional Islam written by professors for Western professors and those students really committed to learning it.

Tanzih (immanence) and tashbih (transcendence) are recurring concepts from beginning to end that bears weight around the relationship between creation and God. It pops up early on with a few diagrams and I recommend getting a solid grasp of this before moving on as you may not benefit from future concepts set forth later such as the concept of Light. Similarly, when the concept of Light is discussed I recommend doing the same before moving on. Due to simple lucidity from the perspective of the two concepts aforementioned a great deal of light is indeed shed even to those who may know a thing or two about Islam. Light is only one yet shades of darkness are many, and darkness is merely the absence of light; with tanzih and tasbih in mind this statement will open up an array of new meaning towards the Reality of God. I found the covenant of Alast, servanthood and vicegerency, the secret of names, the human being, the power of names i.e., the ability to abstract, the hierarchy of creation, and many other headings to be tremendously beneficial. In the final section of the book the authors explain the three epistemic approaches to the religion as philosophy (falasafa), dogmatic theology (kalam), and theoretical Sufism (tasawwuf). Giving the ups and downs of all three after ending with Sufism as the main vehicle towards spiritual fulfillment and realization through the work of unveiling (kashf), this is the clearly preferred approach to realizing God by the authors. The authors dedicated the last section of the book on the dimension of ihsaan (spiritual excellence) solely to Sufism with a focus on doing what is beautiful to get closer to God.

The only issue worth mentioning is some of the words describing God is quite cavalier, more adab would have been apt when choosing these words to say the least since it happens more than a few times.

Lin Kudla says

Wordy. Very wordy. What seems like it could have been said in half the pages was drawn out. The author(s)

are awesome, but tangent-driven, though I recommend the book for anyone looking to learn about the details of the traditional Islamic faith.

Mike Blyth says

Although I have lived and worked in Muslim countries, this is the first comprehensive book I have read on the subject of Islam. Rather than just sketching the basic beliefs, as is done in many shorter works, this book goes deeper. It's also very sympathetic and almost exclusively an insider's view, "emic" rather than "etic" if you like those terms.

If there is a bias, it is toward a presentation that is conciliatory to other religions. To overstate it a bit, this view says, "Although some less-informed or uneducated Muslims believe that Islam is the only way to salvation, there's plenty of room in the Koran to indicate to the enlightened that good, god-fearing, Christians, Jews, and even Hindus and others can also be saved." Someone who knows a lot more than I told me that the problem with this is that it ignores the issue of abrogation, the idea that gives precedence to later Koranic revelations than earlier ones, and that the later revelations tend to be less conciliatory.

Another limitation is that the book describes "high" Islam rather than folk Islam as practiced by millions of ordinary people around the world. Also, although Shariah is described as one of the main elements of Islam, there is not even an overview of its important elements. All in all, the book is more concerned with the abstractions and theology of Islam than with what it means in practice to average Muslims in various contexts.

Mina says

When you are born into and live a thing for so long, it is not uncommon that among scrutinizing the details you miss the bigger picture. As a practicing Muslim, and having been so since the day I was born and my father recited the Islamic call to prayer in my ear, Islam has been at the centre of my life. When I began to study my religion academically, I never took the time to look at that singular 'bigger picture' which is most obvious to an outsider looking in. As a visual learner, I like to be able to organize my thoughts into maps where I can see progression and relationships. I think that may be one of the biggest reasons why I love to read history - I continually look around myself and wonder where such an object or idea came from and how it came about to be as it is. Without really realizing that I needed to do that with my faith, I did it with Sachiko and William through this book.

This is the best text I have come across so far (in the english language) that effectively presents theological Islam in a clear and concise way. The authors work from the foundations of the faith up, presenting Islam to us with no preconceived notions of a knowledgeable reader. It leans slightly Sufi in ideology, but I believe that to be a negligible point for the most part. I will be recommending this book in the future to my non-Muslim and even Muslim acquaintances, as a way in which to introduce to them - as the fitting title states - the vision of Islam.

Zakaria Bziker says

Dense dense dense...

Reim says

A great read, comprehensive and complex. Avoids buzz words and stereotypes to uncover Islam as a system of belief, not a political identity. It details Islam from an ideological perspective without making any assumptions about the reader. Since the book was written by two scholars with experience teaching Islam as an academic subject, it has a textbook quality. Admittedly, it becomes very detailed and philosophical at times, but is divided up into very specific and readable sections. Overall, a great insight into the depths of Islamic faith and belief, and a beautiful vision of what Islam is at its core.

Sarah says

Must-do reading. One of the best books I've read about Islam, even if it does lean to the Sufi (but hey, ain't nothin' wrong with that!).
