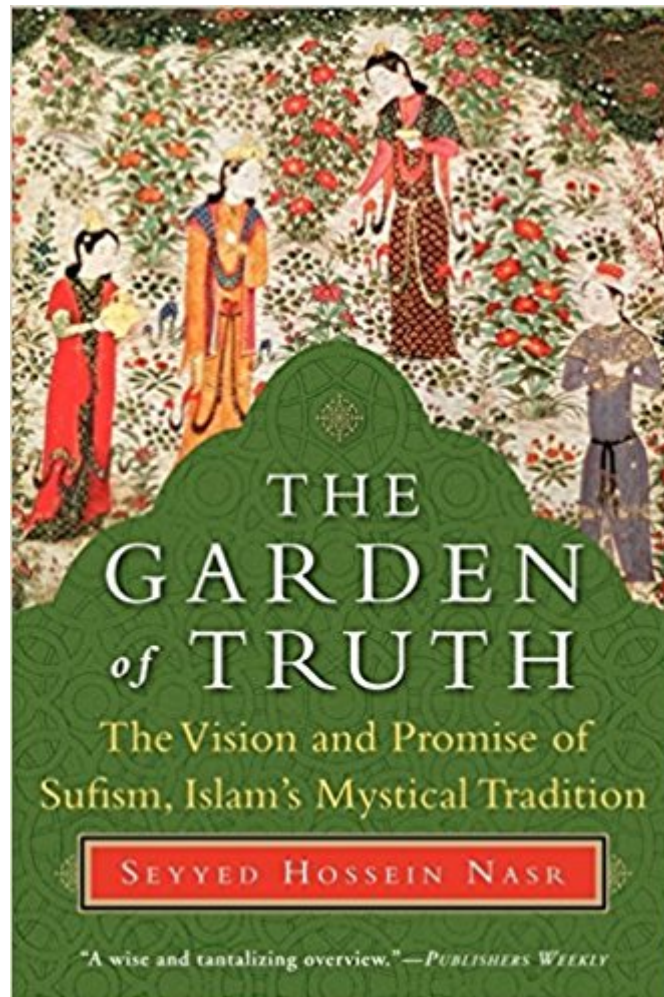


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The Garden Of Truth: The Vision And Promise Of Sufism, Islam's Mystical Tradition



Synopsis

The headlines are filled with the politics of Islam, but there is another side to the world's fastest-growing religion. Sufism is the poetry and mysticism of Islam. This mystical movement from the early ninth century rejects worship motivated by the desire for heavenly reward or the fear of punishment, insisting rather on the love of God as the only valid form of adoration. Sufism has made significant contributions to Islamic civilization in music and philosophy, dance and literature. The Sufi poet Rumi is the bestselling poet in America. But in recent centuries Sufism has been a target for some extremist Islamic movements as well as many modernists. The Garden of Truth presents the beliefs and vision of the mystical heart of Islam, along with a history of Sufi saints and schools of thought. In a world threatened by religious wars, depleting natural resources, a crumbling ecosystem, and alienation and isolation, what has happened to our humanity? Who are we and what are we doing here? The Sufi path offers a journey toward truth, to a knowledge that transcends our mundane concerns, selfish desires, and fears. In Sufism we find a wisdom that brings peace and a relationship with God that nurtures the best in us and in others. Noted scholar Seyyed Hossein Nasr helps you learn the secret wisdom tradition of Islam and enter what the ancient mystics call the "garden of truth." Here, liberate your mind, experience peace, discover your purpose, fall in love with the Divine, and find your true, best self.

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Customer Reviews

Seyyed Hossein Nasr is a rare phenomena in these days of religious decadence, earth-ravaging materialism, and all around despair. Nasr's sober call to return to our religions, not to the truncated

and diseased state into which we've reduced them, but to their still beating hearts which are everywhere the same, is the driving force behind this latest title "The Garden of Truth", which is a sort of inner sequel to his "The Heart of Islam" published in 2002. This 'still beating heart' is not other than the esoteric or inner dimension of religion which informs its outer practices and doctrines, and it is this that communicates most directly the religion's presiding idea. In Islam this 'beating heart' is what we call in the West Sufism, but which is also known as Tasawwuf in Arabic, and 'Irfan in Persian. This living tradition, which goes back to the noble Prophet Muhammad, consists of many disciplines, all of which seek to purify our soul and render it transparent vis-à-vis the Divine Attributes. And while tomes have been written on the myriad aspects of this tradition it is incredibly difficult to give a concise summary that does even the least bit of justice to it. In fact I can think of no one better qualified to undertake such a task than Seyyed Hossein Nasr. Over the past four decades Nasr has, more than any other Muslim scholar, informed the Western world about not only the Islamic tradition, but its central virtues, which are preserved most succinctly in Sufism. Covering Nasr's qualifications for this is beyond the scope of this humble review, but suffice it to say that he has lived the reality of Sufism for over fifty years, has studied under traditional masters of Islamic philosophy/gnosis, and is recognized as a peerless scholar of Islamic civilization, its arts, and its philosophical tradition. While "The Garden of Truth" is a summary it is not simply another academic appraisal. Instead this was written as a Sufi treatise for Western seekers. While summarizing the basic doctrines of Sufism, its historical unfolding, its luminaries and prerogatives Nasr also draws a basic map of the Path for the potential wayfarer. Obviously a book can never take the place of a living Master, but books can be useful supports for embracing the spiritual life. Also, it should be noted that although this is a summary it is by no means a light read. Since Nasr's perspective is informed by Islam's long tradition of knowledge-based mysticism his interpretations of Sufi doctrine, symbolism, and rites are tempered with that principal knowledge associated with speculative metaphysics. It is this edge that allows Nasr to communicate the sublimity of the Islamic vision, and of Sufism in particular, to a Western audience with all of the nuance necessary to make its central doctrines and practices intelligible. As the destructive and hedonistic culture of the secularized West dominates more and more of the globe, crushing indigenous cultures, erasing the traces of their religions, and subordinating their economies, one wonders what could curb the sheer madness such a domination entails. For the spiritual man the only answer is inwardness, self-reform, and trust in God. For some of us Islam, and Sufism, are the means whereby these goals are sought, and I can think of no better a guide than Seyyed Hossein Nasr.

This review was originally written for this book, but somehow found itself linked to Dr. Nasr's collected papers, edited by Chittick. "The Garden of Truth" is an absolutely beautiful book. Although it might be called a primer, it is deep and rich and filled with sentences that make you stop and ponder and contemplate the wonders of the inward and outward aspects of the Divine. The chapter on love and beauty alone is pure gold. What I also liked about Dr. Nasr's narrative is his respect and appreciation for other mystical traditions, both East and West. His is no narrow view. I am a Jungian analyst by profession, but an amateur Sufi, amateur meaning one who does something for the sheer love of it. This book has deepened that love.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr is professor of Islamic Studies at George Washington University and the author of many books including *The Heart of Islam*. This erudite, enlightening, and wide-ranging overview of Sufism is the result of 50 years of both scholarly study and existential participation in Islam's mystical tradition. He notes at the start of this survey: "The Sufi tradition contains a vast metaphysical and cosmological set of doctrines elaborated over a long period by masters of gnosis. It contains methods of spiritual realization that address nearly all the different spiritual possibilities on the levels of action, love, and knowledge. It has preserved over many centuries going back to the Prophet a regular chain of transmission of initiatic power (walayah/wilayah) and the grace (al-barakah) necessary for the spiritual journey. And above all, it can enable men and women to reach a state of sanctity." Nasr believes that Sufism is uniquely qualified to help spiritual seekers in the West appreciate other religions and to serve as an antidote to Islamic fundamentalism. With its rich blend of mystical poetry, its diverse literature, its spiritual ethics, and its many musical masterworks, this path of the heart speaks to all those who yearn for a closer intimacy with God, a richer interior life, and a spiritual repertoire of practices that give life depth and meaning. The book is divided into sections on: * What It Means to Be Human (Who Are We and What Are We Doing Here?) * Truth (The Knowledge That Illuminates and Delivers from the Bondage of Ignorance) * Love and Beauty (The Fire That Attracts and Consumes, the Peace That Calms and Liberates) * Goodness and Human Action (To Do His Will, to Conform to the Divine Norm) * How Do We Reach the Garden of Truth? (The Path to the One) * Access to the Center (Sufism Here and Now) * The Sufi Tradition and the Sufi Orders (Reflections on the Manifestation of Sufism in Time and Space) * The Tradition of Theoretical Sufism and Gnosis. The Sufi path leads from the deserts of forgetfulness, selfishness, and separation to the Garden of Truth where individuals can realize their true identity. According to Nasr, followers of the path are expected to be God's servant and always grateful, no matter what the circumstances. The author acknowledges that the road to the Garden of Truth

involves acquiring and realizing unitive knowledge and being immersed in love and beauty. Sufis are known as "people of the heart," and intimacy with God means acting with humility, charity, nobility, sincerity, and truthfulness. Another practice is imitation of the Prophet Muhammad, who modeled a glorious way to live. Sufi masters talk about the importance of adab, a form of courtesy and kindness which pervades everything one does, from greeting people to eating to sitting in a gathering. Shaykhs help dervishes learn the spiritual disciplines and virtues, which are the ornaments of the soul. According to Nasr, the integration of the contemplative life and the active life is the hallmark of Sufi spirituality. In these uncivil times, we need more people who have been trained in the spiritual efficacy of loving actions. A life of beauty is a life where attention, being present, gratitude, peace, and compassion are manifested at home and at work. Sufism also nurtures the spiritual arts which in turn can transform our lives both privately and publicly. The Garden of Truth by Seyyed Hossein Nasr is a very helpful illumination of this beautiful path.

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