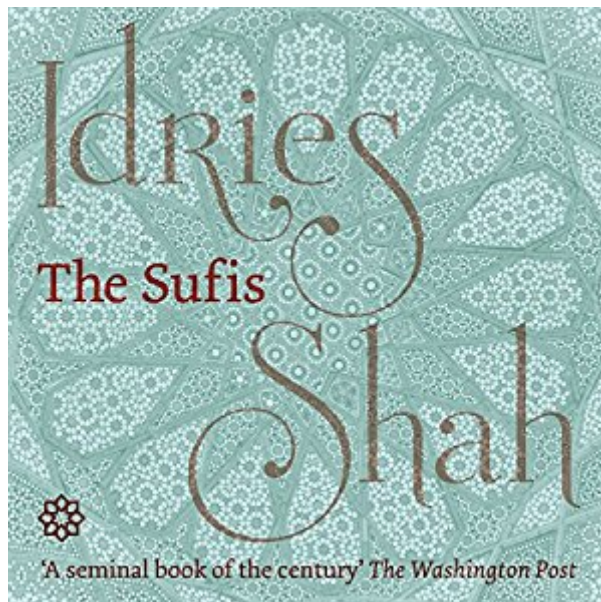


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# The Sufis



## Synopsis

When it first appeared in 1964, *The Sufis* was welcomed as the decisive work on the subject of Sufi thought. Rich in scope, author Idries Shah explained clearly the traditions and philosophy of the Sufis to a Western audience for the first time. In the five decades since its release, the book has been translated into more than two dozen languages, and has found a wide readership in both East and West. Containing detailed information on the major Sufi thinkers, and literary characters, such as Nasrudin, it is regarded as a key work on both Sufism and Eastern Philosophy. A text in scores of leading universities around the world for courses on Sufism, Eastern thought, and Islamic philosophy, *The Sufis* has been used by psychologists and physicists, by school teachers, lawyers, social workers, and by ordinary members of the public.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Mostly I am responding to the review by Wrightson, who sounds like an anti-Shah crusader, perhaps jealous that his pitiful and venomous self-published book does not sell. "I could not persuade any of my local libraries to buy it while all of them, both public and academic ones, carry MANY books by Idries Shah. I think he confuses Sufism with some systems with which Sufism does not share much, and then he expresses his disappointment that he did not get what he wanted but what is actually there. It is like expecting some intoxicant but discovering that you get nutritious substance but without the expected kick. So, he actually fights his own demons but why he involves the book *The Sufis* and the most remarkable teacher Idries Shah is incomprehensible to an objective observer. The real Sufism is not some kind of either intellectual speculation or religious

emotion. It is a pragmatic system which can lead the honest to self-development, to transcending ordinary confusion, from being as it were blind to Reality. Non-Sufis and fake Sufis are AT BEST people who (to continue the analogy) are blind but through frequent bumping into objects (our ordinary trial and error existence) memorized what is located where in order to avoid future painful collisions. Such a system can be used as an ersatz of real perceptions but in the fluid world the memorized location of objects is constantly changes. Therefore this method of living is far from being efficient, as we can see in our daily lives (full of painful mistakes and misunderstanding) and by watching/reading the news, usually about bad things. We ALL use such a system because we do not know how to develop sight. Thus comparing Sufism to anything else but itself, as Wrightson does, is a misunderstanding. All these other systems are not capable of leading the seeker to developing the sixth sense. And they are NOT a source of Sufi inspiration, Sufism does not owe anything to them whatever the superficial similarities. These other systems are fossils of what once might have been a living school, as contemporary Sufism is. Nowadays, they have only mostly cultural, anthropological, historical, quasi-religious or other significance, but they have nothing to do with what Shah describes and what Wrightson does is worse than comparing apples and oranges. The Sufi books do not function as a source of secrets how to go to heaven or to live heavenly life here and now. I remember talking to a manager of an esoteric bookstore who said that Idries Shah just teases but never openly says how things are. This eager would-be esotericist craves to be told what to memorize and use, as in a secret society or something. He barks up the wrong tree. The secret is that there is no secret of THIS type. The books, plus guidance and HONEST effort may lead to the ability of seeing this secret by developing the skill, the ability, the organ of seeing. How could you explain to a country bumpkin an intricate scientific concept? He needs to go to appropriate schools first, to build a foundation. There is a wonderful analogy to that in the tale of The Algonquin Cinderella in another book by Idries Shah World Tales. Only the honest youngest sister can see the Invisible One. The only reviewer here who gave the book only one star (and he also did it with other books by Idries Shah) is perhaps angry that he is like the older sisters of Cinderella: they may desire to see the Invisible One but have not developed the prerequisite sixth sense, they did not have what it takes. The hopeful thing is, that the older sisters, at one level of interpretation, can be seen as older selves, can be transcended, can actually morph into the youngest sister, capable of seeing the Invisible One. Can the angry crusader undergo such a metamorphosis? Of course. Epiphanies on the road to Damascus happen more often than we think. Here is your chance Wrightson. Are you a sincere seeker after truth or just a desperate peddler of your own claptrap? But

I should not confront your ghoul so directly, as you can read in *The Riddles*, one of stories in Shah's World Tales. It can help. It did help me. I was perhaps as full of air as you are. What a relief it was when my ghoul collapsed under its own weight like the Soviet Union. Unless the reader becomes like Cinderella, they have no chance of success and their musings lead nowhere, which may cause eruptions of anger, depression, disbelief and many other emotions except the only result that matters: seeing. A good method of increasing one's suitability for the Teaching is by being generous. It helps to eliminate anger, greed and self-esteem which are major stumbling blocks on the road to develop new perceptions. These perceptions are not esoteric in the sense that everyone has them to some degree in his own area of expertise, either his profession or hobby. *The Way of the Sufi* (yet another book by Idries Shah) is a specific methodology which helps one find higher perceptions in all areas of life, going beyond one's forte. Good luck to the honest seekers. Of course honesty is not necessarily inborn, so do not despair, you can develop it. Start by choosing the title which is in the format which you already like, otherwise you will start with an additional handicap, on top of all the other ones which we already have with all our fascination-cum-worries of the phenomenal world. With time and practice you can transcend your ordinary anxieties and your linear thinking. But not if you are greedy for quick results, even disguised (dishonestly) as search for truth (*Seeker After Truth* may disabuse you of such ideas). I just discovered on Wikipedia ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Sufis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Sufis)) more specific information about *The Sufis* new edition made available for the 50th anniversary of the original publication. This is Shah's first and fundamental presentation of Sufism in the West where in the last century only scarce authentic knowledge was available (like his father's books) or one could find only uninformed and superficial accounts of a scholarly "orientalist" type. Here, one can find out how Sufism has been invisibly influencing the world affairs for millenia, perhaps starting with antiquity, including the Greek ancient philosophers of our own tradition. Shah was attacked by entrenched interests but he has proven by his own life and publications that real Sufism is alive and that any other form is just imitation, whether piously religious or academic. One can read about Sufism or in Sufism, but a historian of, say, medicine is usually not capable of performing a surgery on you. To whom would you rather go for consultation? Probably a surgeon rather than a historian, however bright and entertaining. Same in the most important area of your own development, your own understanding of where you came from and where will you go. Ordinarily, we in the West have had a choice of believing the religious myths or, seeing their inadequacy, becoming atheists or agnostics. Shah provides the better, and the only real, alternative: knowledge which may come if the intended receiver has become capable of receiving. Sufism is a miracle as if teaching my dog how to read, talk and reason. If I can admit

that I am relatively as stupid vis-a-vis the real mechanisms of life as my dog is relative to reading - then I can start from this posture of humility, having emptied myself of dirty water to admit the clean one. Enjoy. Perhaps at first only at the level of clearing the underbrush and admitting new information.

This book was first published by the author in 1964. I wish to thank the Idries Shah Foundation for making this important work on Sufi Thought available to its readers in the digital format. I was also impressed by the Digital Services Inc., (the seller of the book). After placing my order for this book I started to 'thumb through' its pages within 15 minutes on my iPad, while I received the sale statement in my email the next morning! I compared this digital edition of 'The Sufis' to my old paper copy (by The Octagon Press, London, 1989). I was pleasantly surprised to see numbers in blue color in the text of this book. The 'blue numbers' are hot-linked to annotations at the end. These annotations provide explanations, authors and relevant publications etc. There are quite a few positive, thoughtful, and comprehensive reviews of 'The Sufis' available to the interested person here on the Website and I happen to be in agreement with their views and would avoid redundancy.

This and Idries Shah's other works are important for education leading, if circumstances are favorable, to greater knowledge of self and of life itself. By favorable circumstance I would mention being able to suspend preconceptions about this work and about oneself and facing the not invariably pleasant truth. This is a task aided and guided by these readings. It is a book for serious students or those who would become so, and can also be read for its great informational and entertainment value. Shah's books are the most valuable I have read.

I rate this book highly because I have used it for years as a resource for my own studies. After wearing out one copy I have bought a replacement. Shah carefully follows the origins and growth of Sufism from its earliest inception in antiquity through its blossoming in the 7th through the 9th centuries and into the present. He lays out many overlooked or obscure references. I would recommend the book to anyone wanting to learn about Sufism or anyone needing a resource.

This book, although at times very hard to read the first time around, is a great insight into the history of a people who followed a way that has existed since the beginning of time. This book is recommended for anyone who has heard of the Sufis because of the rise of the so called "new age" movement gaining ground. Idres Shah delivers in this historical book with great stories as well as

significant historical preferences that paints a clear picture of where the artform of alchemy and the occult originated from. Insightful, informative, funny, and fun to read, the Sufis has proven to be a gem in my ever expanding and ever growing library.

A classic of its kind, and worth going back to, but by no means an easy read

Begins really well, becomes a bit dry and dull by the end, occasionally slips into claiming lots of famous people as Sufis even if they never said they were Sufis, but gives a good starting point for anyone seriously interested in studying Sufis.

I just read 10% so far...for me, this is not a book to read completely in a few days...I will read, enjoy, meditate, work and live...maybe I will spend years reading, consulting...re-readind...it is not for intellect...it is for feeling and doing...inspirational...I am just waiting for Kindle edition because it its big to have it with me all the time...

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