



A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century: Shaikh Ahmad al-Alawi

Martin Lings

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'Almost a prerequisite for any serious study of Sufism in European languages': this was the verdict of Seyyed Hossein Nasr in his review of the first edition of the book. According to the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, it is 'one of the most thorough and intimately engaging books on Sufism to be produced by a Western scholar'. Certainly there is nothing second-hand about it. The author lets Sufis speak for themselves and, in a series of unusual and absorbing texts mainly translated from Arabic, he gives a vivid picture of life in a North African Sufi order. Against this background stands the unforgettable figure of the Algerian Shaikh who was head of the order from 1909 until his death in 1934. The last few chapters are mainly devoted to his writings, which include some penetrating aphorisms, and which end with a small anthology of his remarkable mystic poems.

A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century: Shaikh Ahmad al-Alawi Details

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Eight says

an account of one greatest sufi saint in algeria where Martin had a chance to meet him quite few times and became interested in sufism.

Wayfarer says

From a literary point of view a very-well written piece explicating the Spiritual Way and Doctrine of Shaykh Ahmed al-Alawi, from the lenses of an adherent and propagandist for the perennialist school, the late Dr. Lings. The book begins well with a delightful re-telling of the "encounters" of a western physician with the Shaykh. However, there are passages in the book which are rather obscure (and concepts not readily rendered into language) and despite the best efforts of the author, much is 'lost in translation' and leaves room for misunderstandings and distortions of the intended purpose - that of introducing to the wider Western readership the 'spiritual heritage and legacy' of the Shaykh Ahmed al-Alawi.

Cuneyt says

This book was a life changer for me. Literally. I started a, or more fairly, I was taken to a ride which lasted until today after reading it. I have met other who had similar experiences.

It certainly is not the best book of Lings. I loved the first part, translation of the real life account of a French physician, who spent some time with Sheikh Alawi. This is a short chapter followed by more in depth discussion of Shaikh Al Alawi's views.

As I said, highly recommended; worked pretty well for me.

Kholboi Christine Vaiphei says

A very good book, for a Sufi lover. The detailed insights of the writer, as well as his expositions and his deep insight into the subject is an enlightenment for all his readers.

Maria Lancaster says

A gem about the great Sheikh Ahmad al-Alawi

Tim says

It is difficult to imagine the entire range of benefits someone could attain from a book like this. It would depend entirely on the reasons for approaching the book, but it could serve many different goals. As a person who longs to move deeper into knowledge of Sufism and its empirical practices, I found myself tending to look for areas where I found resonance in my own experience. However, it also served as a wonderful illustration of the practices of Sufi orders. In that sense the title can be a bit misleading. While it does focus on the life of Sheikh Al-Alawi, the true focus is on the way that his life became one with THE One, which ultimately makes it a story of divinity manifested through a true saint, and how that saint's life served as an illustration of the practices of the way.

What the book then becomes is a picture of life around a Sufi order. Lings immerses us in the impact the Sheikh and the order had on everyone who came into its orbit. He begins with the observations of an agnostic doctor who had come to treat the Sheikh, continues with a brief introduction to Sufism, then incorporates statements from disciples of the Sheikh. The first part concludes with descriptions of the Sheikh's own progression in the order.

The second part is entirely focused on doctrine, and Lings is a master at tying the specific into the universal as is the pattern of the Qur'an and Islam. The Qur'an and Sunnah were the foremost guides in Sheikh Al-Alawi's life, and through those sources the Sheikh begins with the central doctrine of Oneness of Being. From there, Lings moves us through the Sheikh's doctrine on the symbolism of the Arabic alphabet to the deep rich meaning behind ritual purification and Islamic prayer (Salat) to doctrine around gnosis, the three worlds and the great peace. An outstanding picture of the Sufi path and one that Seyyed Hossein Nasr and others consider as essential reading in Sufism.

Foad says

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Bahar Datun says

awe some... the grace of god...\\]

F. Zahra Hassan says

Lovely book

Farrah says

a rare read of Sufi life
