relate the Temple of Jerusalem to the site where Abraham had offered the sacrifice of his son.\footnote{See, for more details, Hamid al-Din al-Farāḥi, \textit{al-Ra’y al-Sabih fi man ḫusa‘ ‘l-Dhabih}, Urdu tr. Amin Aḥsan Islahi, \textit{Dhabih Kaun Hay?} (Lahore: Khuddām al-Qur‘ān, 1975).}

\textbf{Muhammad Mushtaq Ahmad}

\begin{quote}


More than seven hundred years after his passing from this transient abode, Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (604–672/1207–1273) has been undergoing an unexpected revival in the most unexpected of places, the West and particularly the United States. Versions of his poems by American poet Coleman Barks have sold more than a quarter million copies in the last decade in the US, far more than any other work of poetry. Countless other renditions of his poems have been published and many have embraced his verses and ideas. In particular, the New Age movement has made him a steady staple of its spiritual diet, with pop gurus like Deepak Chopra spouting his wisdom, celebrities like Madonna putting his verse to song, and New Age-style workshops, festivals, and centres attached to his name.

With all this popularity has come a heavy price: the authentic teachings and the Islamic and Sufi groundings of those teachings have been sacrificed or compromised for the sake of accessibility and relevance to contemporary Western lifestyles. In this popularization and vulgarization of Rūmī, particular blame goes to the renditions often presented as translations of Rūmī’s poetry when they are merely the literal translations of Orientalist scholars such as R. J. Nicholson and A. J. Arberry put into contemporary American English idiom by authors who know no Persian.

Correctives to this sometimes crass popularization of Rūmī have been forthcoming for several years by scholars well-versed in the Persian language, the Islamic and Sufi traditions, and the historical and cultural context of the time and place Rūmī inhabited, all factors essential in determining the proper context, import, and meaning of Rūmī’s writings and teachings. Foremost
among these scholars have been Annemarie Schimmel (d. 2003), Franklin Lewis, and William Chittick. Chittick, perhaps the most authoritative American scholar of Sufism, is best known for his voluminous and erudite works on another great Muslim sage of the 7th/13th century, Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī (560–638/1165–1240). However, long before he penned his monumental works on Ibn al-ʿArabī, he had written two important volumes on Rūmī. The second of these volumes, *The Sufi Path of Love: the Spiritual Teachings of Rumi*, published in 1982, has become well-known as perhaps the best scholarly and most authentic introduction to the actual spiritual teachings and worldview of Mawlānā Rūmī. Chittick’s first book on the sage from Konya, however, has remained in obscurity since its publication in Iran in 1973. This forgotten work, entitled *The Sufi Doctrine of Rumi*, has been republished in a colorful, handsome new edition by World Wisdom Books. In addition to containing the full original text of the 1973 volume, it includes a new foreword by Seyyed Hossein Nasr and a new preface by Chittick. In addition, the work is copiously and exquisitely illustrated, with elegant Persian miniatures and calligraphy adorning every page.

*The Sufi Doctrine of Rumi* is an exposition of Rūmī’s teachings as they are understood and explicated in the Sufi tradition, particularly as they have been expressed by authors also influenced by the school of Ibn al-ʿArabī. It should be mentioned that the two schools of Rūmī and Ibn al-ʿArabī were far from mutually exclusive and the later Sufi tradition saw them as expressing the same ideas in different ways. The book establishes Rūmī as a central exponent of Islamic spirituality rooted deeply in the Qur’ān and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and shows how his verse and prose beautifully reveal the heart and essence of the Islamic spiritual tradition. As such, it is a far cry from and an urgent rejoinder to the presentation of Rūmī as an unorthodox free-form whirling ecstatic rebel in New Age circles. In addition to the text of the work, the manifold illustrations also present Rūmī’s teachings in an aesthetic environment far more in conformity with the spiritual context of Rūmī’s teachings than a travesty such as the best-selling *The Illuminated Rumi*, which juxtaposes in its illustrations with no sense of context, every manner of religious symbol and New Age icon, from the front cover drawing of Ramana Maharishi, a sparrow’s nest, and the Divine Name ʿAl-Ḥayy to the Greco-Roman sculpture in a mandala on the back cover.

Chittick’s work summarizes the teachings of Mawlānā Rūmī in a concise and lucid manner, in which Rūmī is seen “from within” as a pre-eminent exponent of Islamic spirituality and a shining star in the Sufi tradition, the substance of which dates from the origin of the Islamic Revelation and continues to the present. The book is equally an introduction to Rūmī and an
introduction to Islamic spirituality and Sufism, particularly in its theoretical aspects.

The book is divided into four chapters: I. Sufism and Islam; II. God and the World: “The Infinitude of the All-Possible”; III. The Nature of Man; IV. Operative Sufism. The first chapter is a general introduction to the relationship of Sufism and Islam. Chittick counters the Orientalist contention that Sufism is somehow external to Islam, arguing instead that it is its very core, the inner dimension of the Islamic Revelation. He also explains how there is no Sufism without Islam and the practice of the Shari’ah and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) has always been integral to the Sufi tradition. Chittick quotes Rūmī in order to illustrate the relation between Islamic Law and practice, Sufism, and the Divine Reality, or, in the terminology commonly used in the Sufi tradition, the Shari’ah (the Divine law), the Ṭariqah (the spiritual path), and the Haqiqah (the Reality or Truth, the goal of the path): “In short, the Law is like learning the theory of alchemy from a teacher or a book, and the Path is (like) making use of chemicals and rubbing the copper upon the philosopher’s stone, and the Truth is (like) the transmutation of the copper into gold . . . The law is [theoretical] knowledge, the path action, and the Truth attainment unto God” (pp. 20-21).

This chapter also explores the importance of gnosis (ma’rifah) and love (‘ishq or muḥabbah) in Sufi teachings and also stresses that Sufi doctrine and theory is never studied for its own sake but is an aid to actual practice — travelling on the path to God. Sufi doctrine is thus not about dry philosophizing but actual spiritual realization. The rest of the chapters deal successively with the three major dimensions of Sufi doctrine: God, man, and the attainment of man unto God.

Chapter two explores the mysteries of the nature of the Divinity and His relation to this world, employing the verses of Rūmī and the philosophical expositions of the school of Ibn al-‘Arabī to illuminate the subtleties and complexities of the relation of the world and God. The chapter is based on the idea that the Shahādah (the Testimony that there is no god but God and Muḥammad is His Messenger), contains two complementary perspectives. One, that of tanzib, that God is completely transcendent and incomparable to all things and two, that of ṭashbih, that God is immanent, that all things derive their total reality from God, for He alone is al-Ḥaq, Reality itself. The true understanding of this complementarity is obtained only through gnosis. Rūmī states “No created being is unconnected with Him: [but] that connection, O uncle is indescribable. Because in the spirit there is no separating and uniting, while (our) thought cannot think except of separating and uniting” (p. 31). The chapter goes on to criticize the Orientalist treatments of Sufi doctrines as
logical systems and mental constructs instead of seeing their open-ended nature as guides to spiritual realization. Finally, issues such as the process of creation as God’s self-revelation and the question of theodicy and the reasons for the existence of evil are expounded in order to establish the relationship between God and the world.

If the second chapter dealt with God’s relationship to the world, the third deals with the highest of God’s creations in the world, man. The chapter is divided into three parts, which summarize man’s nature, journey, and goal, entitled respectively Universal Man, The Fall, and The Trust. The doctrine of the Universal Man (al-insān al-kāmil), as it is called in the school of Ibn al-‘Arabi, is the prototype of both the microcosm and macrocosm and is thus the foundation of the universe; it is man in his origin and totality, the perfect man, the Prophet. Rūmī states: “The father of mankind, who is the lord of “He taught the Names,” hath hundreds of thousands of sciences in every vein. To his soul accrued (knowledge of) the name of every thing, even as that thing exists (in its real nature) unto the end (of the world) . . . Inasmuch as the eye of Adam saw by means of the Pure Light, the soul and inmost sense of the names became evident to him” (p. 49). The Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) is also identified in the Sufi tradition as the Universal, or Perfect, Man. Rūmī: “So it is realized that Muhammad was the foundation [of the Universe]. ‘But for thee [Muhammad] I would not have created the heavens.’ Every thing that exists, honor and humility, authority and high degree, all are of his dispensation and his shadow, for all have become manifest from him” (p. 53). The Fall deals with Iblis’ rebellion against God and man’s consequent disobedience and exile onto earth. The reversal and return unto God comes through conquering heedlessness and cultivating yearning and remembrance of God. Finally, The Trust, a topic often mentioned by Mawlānā Rūmī in his poetry, concerns the trust (al-amānāb) placed upon the shoulders of man at creation to fulfil his vicegerency (khilāfat) on earth. The purpose of religion is precisely to enable man to fulfil this trust that he accepted before he came into this world.

The final chapter moves beyond doctrine into what Chittick terms ‘operative Sufism.’ This is the Sufi path that is traversed through struggle against one’s lower self (nafs) by the remembrance of God (dhikr) and the realization of one’s true nature and final goal. This chapter is divided into four sections: 1. Union with God, 2. The Nafs, 3. Knowledge and Method, 4. The Limitations of Rational Knowledge. The first section deals with the ultimate aim of the Sufi path, which is also the final goal of the human journey, what Chittick terms ‘union with God’ (al-wišāl bi ’l-haqq). The stages of the path to this goal, such as extinction (fanā’) and subsistence (baqā’) are described, as
well as the transcending of the individual self that they entail. Rūmī states “When a man’s ‘I’ is negated (and eliminated) from existence, then what else remains? Consider, O denier” and “Everything is perishing but His face: unless thou art in His face (essence), do not seek to exist” (p. 71). The second section concerns a theme which Rūmī mentions often, the ego (naḍ) that prevents man from knowing his own true nature. Rūmī states “the idol of your self is the mother of (all) idols . . .” (p. 82). This is followed by a discussion of the relation between knowledge and method, or how theoretical knowledge is turned into “lived” reality. The organ which makes this transformation possible is the heart, the centre of the human being and the point of access to God. Rūmī states in verses reminiscent of al-Hallāj, “I gazed into my own heart; There I saw Him, He was nowhere else” (p. 86). The final section is an argument from Rūmī that the knowledge that does not lead to spiritual enlightenment is unworthy and the knowledge that is of the mind and the senses and not of the heart and spirit is an example of limitative knowledge that does not enlighten the knower. Rūmī: “Come, recognize that your imagination and sense-perceptions and apprehension are like the reed-cane on which children ride. The sciences of the mystics bear them (aloft); The sciences of sensual men are burdens to them . . . God hath said, ‘(Like an ass) laden with his books [Quran, LXII, 5]’: burdensome is the knowledge that is not from Himself. The Knowledge that is not immediately from Himself does not endure” (p. 95).

An interesting aspect of this book is that it shows how Chittick’s views on Islamic esotericism were initially influenced by the Traditionalist writers. In this work, Chittick often quotes Frithjof Schuon as well as other Traditionalist writers such as R. Guenon, T. Burckhardt, S. H. Nasr, and M. Lings. In his later work, this influence, while present, is not as explicit. Since the Traditionalists were the first to introduce to Western audiences a full-fledged methodology of understanding the spiritual traditions of the great world religions, particularly Islam, ‘from the inside’ and not from an external Eurocentric lens informed by modern Western ideas and values, this influence on Chittick has borne great fruit in the unrivalled in-depth studies of the ideas of Muslim philosophers and mystics that we have come to expect from him. A defining feature of these studies has been to understand Islamic philosophy and spiritual traditions on their own terms and not on terms dictated by whatever methodology may be presently fashionable in western academia.

One of the principal criticisms one can make of this work is that it refers too freely to other sources, particularly the school of Ibn al-‘Arabī, to explain the teachings of Mawlānā Ṭūrba. In his new preface, Chittick preempts this criticism by stating that this was the reason he wrote his second book on
Rūmī, *The Sufi Path of Love*, which attempts to present the teachings of Rūmī on their own, without referencing other Sufi authors. Chittick, however, does insist that this framework, in which Rūmī is explicated by Akbarian notions, is useful as an introduction to Rūmī as well as to Sufi doctrine in general, for this was the framework that numerous Sufi writers used through the centuries. The translations of Rūmī’s verse and prose presented in this book are culled from the works of the great British Orientalists R. J. Nicholson and A. J. Arberry. While these are very competent translations, one feels that Chittick’s own translations would have added an element of homogeneity and harmony to the text, particularly as Chittick is one of the contemporary masters of the art of translation of Islamic texts into the English language. Finally, it would have been very useful if Chittick updated the footnotes, or at least added an appendix, to reflect the last three decades of Rūmī scholarship instead of opting for the complete original text with no changes. Despite these reservations, the book definitively fulfils its purpose as an introduction to Sufi doctrine and Rūmī’s teachings to the intelligent Western reader who seeks to go beyond the facile presentations of Rūmī so pervasive today.

This book is recommended for its beautiful presentation and insightful content that delineates both the fundamentals of Sufi doctrine and Mawlānā Rūmī’s teachings on Sufism and Islam. It is a welcome addition to works on Rūmī being published in America today in that it rectifies many errors, simplifications and problems common in works on Rūmī and his teachings. Its handsome design also offers an alternative to other illustrated works on Rūmī that are rife with New Age connotations that severely compromise the teachings of Rūmī. The book is to be commended on its delicate balance of intellectuality, spirituality, and aesthetics, which together make a delightful combination. All in all, it is an excellent introduction to a sage whose universal message is as timely today as when it was first enunciated.

Fuad S. Naeem


The recent past has witnessed an upsurge in the West’s interest in Islam, which is also reflected in the preoccupation of many scholars with matters pertaining