

The Principles of Sufism

‘Ā’ishah Al-Bā’ūniyyah. **The Principles of Sufism**. Edited & Translated by Th. Emil Homerin New York: NYU Press, 2014, 210 pp.

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Ayesha Al- Ba’uniyya was a reverend Sufi master and a poet, believed to be the only medieval female Islamic mystic who has recorded her views in writing. The literary talent with which she was endowed also gained her prominence as, almost the only one who had composed a plenty of work in Arabic than any other woman prior to the twentieth century. The Sufi tendencies that she inherited from her family touched the apex in her personality.

In the “The Principles of Sufism” the author has combined her intellectual acumen and the spiritual potential to relate the fundamental stages and states for the spiritual neophyte, dilating upon the milestones of this journey i.e. repentance, remembrance, repetition, ascending to the realms of the love of God, surrender, solitude in the crowd, obliviousness of the public opinion and a humility that is the offspring of knowledge. This book is a remarkable account of the pursuit of mystical illumination and the author has discussed at length the four principles which if followed truly and with the utmost sincerity of soul, can help one walk on the path of love for God which is eternal in permanence and firm in spirit.

The author expounds the concept of repentance (*Tawbah*) and what make this delineation exceptional is the statement of inner and outward repentance and the importance of desistance to the repetition of sin. Furthermore the significance of repentance has been elaborated with the traditions of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). Lastly, the concept of *Tawbah* for the Sufi folk has been explained with references from the lives of Sufis.

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Repentance is the foundation for the pillars of happiness. The servant will enter the Sufis' mystical stages only through the door of repentance, and he will attain his goal only by holding fast to repentance.

The second principle of Sufism, discussed in the book, is Sincerity or *Ikhlās*. This chapter explains the true meaning and definition of *Ikhlās*. It also gives a deep insight into various dimensions of sincerity, as like sincerity of thought and deed.

The Prophet, God bless and cherish him, also said, "Whoever does a good deed for worldly gain, his honour will be destroyed, memory of him will be effaced, and his name will be registered in Hell!"

The authenticity and the spiritual exquisiteness of the contents reach its zenith when author refers to some of the Sufis who touched the apex of spiritual sublimity and revealed that

"If you sincerely seek God, He will give you a mirror in which to consider everything."

The author gives multidimensional interpretations of "*Fadhkurooni azkurkum*" alluding to the teachings of several Sufis and the men of knowledge. She adds her own interpretation also while relating the third principle of Remembrance.

"When a person remembers within his inner heart, the tongue's recollection may disturb him, for he is immersed in contemplation and in the presence, absent from all but the One remembered."

The author defines the beliefs of Gnostics that "God is never distracted from you, never forgetful, so you are never apart from Him. He keeps watch over your inner heart in all of your states; if you are in seclusion, He is watching you, and if you are among people, He is watching you. Whatever your state, He is your love"

The crux of the whole thing is that God ordered exclusive devotion to Him by blocking out all thought of creation, followed by blocking out all thought of oneself in exclusive devotion to Him.

Chapter 4 opens with a verse from the Holy Quran that "Say, "If you love God, then follow me, and God will love you!". This verse stands a testimony to the fact that the one who longs to attain the love of

Almighty should follow His beloved the prophet Muhammad (PBUH), may God bless and cherish him!.

The author specifies the philosophy of love in the light of the principles of mysticism. It is said that in this verse of the Quran just mentioned, is an indication that love is not an effect, nor is it procured by obedience or by being free of evil, because He said, "God loves you and forgives your sins."

The author ,after giving detailed mystic interpretation and multifarious dimensions of love and the criterion on which it is tested, the author discusses that she has quoted numerous references from the Holy Quran, the Hadith and from the spiritual elite to elucidate the concept of true love but still she says,

"If you understand that, then know that one sign of love is just as one of them has said, "One who claims to love God without abstaining from what is forbidden him is an impostor! One who claims to love Paradise without giving charity is an impostor! One who claims to love His Emissary without loving poverty is an impostor!"

The writer has also mentioned different signs of love. For example she says that one sign of love is intimacy with Him and estrangement from all else."

The author concludes her book with an epilogue on love as she says, "Inspired with mystical truths both in prose and in poetry regarding this love."

According to her, love is God's most wondrous secret. It is the result of being chosen, the effect of designation, the means to proximity, and the ascension to union. She adds that the quality of love is a fire that does not go out, a blaze that never dies. It is never-ending tears, an untreatable illness, and an incurable disease. It is constant wasting away and incessant grief, a desire without solace, a never-ending passion persistent longing. About the end of love she explains that love is total absorption, effacing the lover as his shadowy existence passes away with promised grace. Divine providence sends him forth to those worthy of saintly sovereignty, with the realities of the attractions of oneness and the subtleties of eternity's breaths.

This chapter contains very inspiring poetic verses about the versatility of Divine love. For example the following verses contain a piece of advice;

Beware of loving anyone save Him

Who owns your entire affair?

For you are from Him, returning to Him;

So, my brother, be with Him and for Him.

Strive hard to make devotion to Him

The heart's affair.