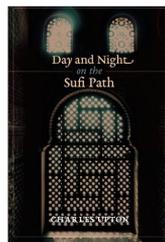


Day and Night on the Sufi Path

By Charles Upton

Kettering, OH: Angelico Press/Sophia Perennis, 2015

Reviewed by Samuel Bendeck Sotillos



“Verily, in the creation of the Heavens and of the Earth, and in the succession of the night and of the day, are signs for men of understanding heart ...”

(Qur’an 3:187/3:190)

With the warfare, occupation and bloodshed that continue to spread not only throughout the Middle East, but find their way into far too many corners of the world, it is difficult for the contemporary mind to make sense of these events. This perplexity all-too-often translates into a negative take on the religion of Islam. One might even question if Islam, at least in its present state, is worthy to be considered a world religion along with the others, such as Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism—for what good comes of it? The mass media certainly does not present an empathetic picture of the faith. So how does one go about inquiring to see if there is anything beyond the extremism and negative propaganda? At the present time, wherever one turns, Islam is under attack along with the diverse peoples that adhere to this faith. However, beyond the damaging portrayal of Islam presented by a corrupt few that have deviated and betrayed the *Straight Path* of the ‘Middle Way’ by lending themselves to extremist interpretations of the Islamic faith—accompanied by plenty of international mercenaries who

masquerade as Muslims—there is a dimension of the religion, poorly understood in the modern secular world, known as *Tasawwuf* or Sufism.

The book under review, *Day and Night on the Sufi Path* by Charles Upton, captures many of the nuances and complexities pertaining to Sufism. Charles Upton has been involved with Sufism for the past twenty-seven years and this volume could be said to be a theoretical summation of his wayfaring on the Path. His understanding is evident in his in-depth analysis and elucidation of the intricacies of Sufi psychology and the Sufi path in general. Regarding Upton's qualifications in preparing this volume he writes, "I am someone with a facility for expressing metaphysical ideas and with some insight into spiritual psychology who has been on the Sufi path for the past quarter century." The book is divided into two parts, Part I consists of "Basic Concepts", "An Outline of Sufism", "The Sufi Doctrine of the *Nafs*—A Detailed Exposition" and "The Practice of Remembrance (*Dhikr*)". Each of these chapters provide useful information for both the individual interested in a better understanding Sufism on a theoretical basis and for the practitioner as well. Part II provides a detailed investigation of "The Science of the Spiritual States" providing perhaps his most unique contribution to the book. This section is a challenging read, yet worth the effort if we want to understand what the spiritual aspirant encounters and the deeper significance of his experiences. Also included in this work are several appendices such as "The Dangers of the Strictly Intellectual Approach to the Spiritual Path" and "The Vulnerabilities and Duties of 'Civic Sufism'".

One of the most confusing points with regard to the mystical or spiritual dimension of religion is its association with a formal orthodoxy. The notion that mysticism, as the inner dimension of religion, can be accessed apart from its outer dimension is a fairly recent phenomenon. Contrary to what many postmodern seekers presume, this notion stems from a misunderstanding about the nature of religion and spirituality. We must approach the spiritual path on God's terms and not our own: "[E]nter houses through their proper doors" (Qur'an 2:189). The inner dimension of religion is only accessible through the outer dimension; as Meister Eckhart noted, "If you would have the Kernel, you must break the husk"¹—break it in the sense of passing through it from the outer to the

¹ Meister Eckhart, quoted in Frithjof Schuon, "The Limitations of Exoterism," in *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 1993), p. 32.

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