

# [Sufism: how did sufism affect islam and the world? essay](https://assignbuster.com/sufism-how-did-sufism-affect-islam-and-the-world-essay/)

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Sufism has come to mean a wide range of beliefs that center on the quest for personal enlightenment in the union with God. Sufis are sometimes described as the mystics of Islam, but Sufism fits awkwardly in the categories of religions. Technically Sufism is a denomination of Islam, however there are many Sufis that are not Muslims and there are many Muslims that are reluctant to consider Sufism part of Islam. One of the few concepts that Sufis seem to agree on is that all religions offer a path to salvation or enlightenment and that true God realization, no matter how it is achieved, transcends the limitations and classification of any religion.

Basically, a saint in any religion is equal to a saint in any other religion because they are inspired by the same Divine source. Initially the term Sufi referred only to those who had achieved God realization, but it has since come to be applied to anyone who follows that particular spiritual path. The name Sufi comes from “ suf,” the Arabic word for wool or “ saf,” the Persian word for pure. Sufis and Islam Sufism began as religious teachers in the Middle East came to learn the Truth of Islam directly from Mohammad. There is no firm historical source for Sufism. Many of the early orders were considered an integrated part of Islam, but as teachings were codified and the elements of Shi’i and Sunni Islam became more distinct, Sufism emerged with an identity.

One of the basic ideas of Sufism is to minimize the self or individual identity. Belonging to a particular group with a unique name is contradictory to this effort. It is said, “ a Sufi is one who is not,” and with a philosophy that seeks the destruction of self-identity it is thought that Sufi’s received their name from outsiders. Initially the term Sufi referred only to those who had achieved God realization, but it has since come to be applied to anyone who follows that particular spiritual path. Sufis and Islam While Sufism did not exist prior to Islam, Sufi doctrine contains many elements that go beyond the teaching of Mohammad. Islam is an external structure in which the individual exists while the internal quest for enlightenment belongs to a realm of Sufi knowledge. This knowledge integrates Islam and ancient doctrine that resembles elements of Greek Philosophy, Zoroastrianism and Hinduism that are part of the Sufi path to God-realization A cornerstone of mysticism is that true knowledge of God is achieved directly and not through an intermediary like a prophet, saint or priest.

Over the centuries this has led to a great deal of political conflict between mystics and non-mysticsSufis outside Islam The difference between Sufis and Islam is sometimes as extreme as the difference between Mormons and Catholics, depending on the particular order. Some Western Sufi orders have even completely divorced themselves from Islam altogether. Yet, Sufism is integrated in Islam. The mystical aspects of Sufism may have ancient influences, but these traditions center on what goes on within a individual.

Islam stresses service, virtue, honesty and charity, the essence of Sufism and a foundation that is necessary for the inner spirituality of Sufism. It may seem that either Sufism influenced Islam or the other way around, but there is little surviving recorded history that sheds light on this. Even when an order does not incorporate Islam for the laws and practice of daily life, there are disciplines and doctrine to the place of Islam. Islam recognizes Abraham, Moses and Jesus, but they credit Mohammad for reintroducing the true religion without contamination. Sufis extend this, believing that all prophets and saints of all religions are inspired by the same source and the rejection of any one is a rejection of the essential Truth behind them all – the one God.

That one God is absolute, extending beyond time or space, and all that is within the universe is of God, including good and evil. Tenants of Sufism The basic Sufi tenants are slightly different from order to order with some variations, additions and/or subtractions, but generally they include the following. • There is only one God, and that God possesses everything. In some orders God is everything and nothing; all that we can perceive and all that we cannot. • Since God is in your Heart, God is always very close even when humanity is very far from God.

Some Sufis believe that since God is in all of us. To truly love God we must love every human and every component of creation, which are considered to be aspects of God. • There are four Holy Scriptures including the Torah, the Psalms of David, the Gospels of Jesus and the Qur’an (this is aligned with Islam so it may differ in some orders). There are also hundreds of other works revealed by prophets including books by Sufi saints. • Nothing happens without God’s will, and Human will is very critical, but it exists within the context of Divine will. Because of God’s will, all things, good and bad, are from God. • Life as we know it is an illusion, and the true life revealed when we reach in the hereafter. Some orders go as far as to describe this process of reality beyond illusion as reincarnation, which is a distinct departure from mainstream Islam.

The Sufi Way The Sufi Way consists of four stages. The first stage involves learning the morality and ethics of all religion, which is accomplished by studying Islam. Non-Islamic Sufis rely on other religions or the writings of Sufi saints to establish the foundation of morals and ethics. The second stage is the path of Sufism, which is a focus on internal practices in the same way that Islam offers the external practices of law and worship. The first two stages are accomplished through practice and imitation, basically surrendering blindly to rituals. The third stage is where the aspirant begins to understand the meaning behind the teaching and practices, experiencing God within and the mystical states of Sufism.

The fourth stage is ma’rifah or gnosis. This is where the knowledge of God is realized and is only achieved by prophets, great masters and saints. The goal of following the Sufi way (or to be devoted to any other religion) is not to become a saint, but rather to align your life with the will of God and to do all that you can to accept and live by God’s Grace. Indeed, if your goal is to become a saint, it is all but assured that because of your own desires you will never become one.

Sufis in your life Remember, to be a Sufi is to be no more than a student of a school. The Sufi way is one that is accepting (not just tolerant) of all other religions, and some orders welcome non-Muslims while encouraging continued participation in one’s own faith. For others, the extraordinary discipline and focus of Islamic life may be an essential component of a new spiritual path. Yet, to be a student is to choose your own commitment to study.

Your encounter with Sufism may be no more than reading the works of Sufi Saints and the study of Sufi Philosophy to serve as simple spiritual inspiration. Whatever your circumstances, I encourage you to embrace your faith to find strength and direction in your own life. I introduce you to Sufism as a potential source of sustenance and direction along the way.

For anyone interested in mysticism, the study of Sufism is an area of riches. Mysticism in many ways provides a bridge between individual religions by exploring the experiences of personal spirituality. A good first encounter with Sufism would be through reading the works of the ancient Sufi poet Rumi, who is currently the best selling poet in this country. Certainly anyone with spiritual interests of any religion will find rewards in an exploration and further understanding of Sufism.