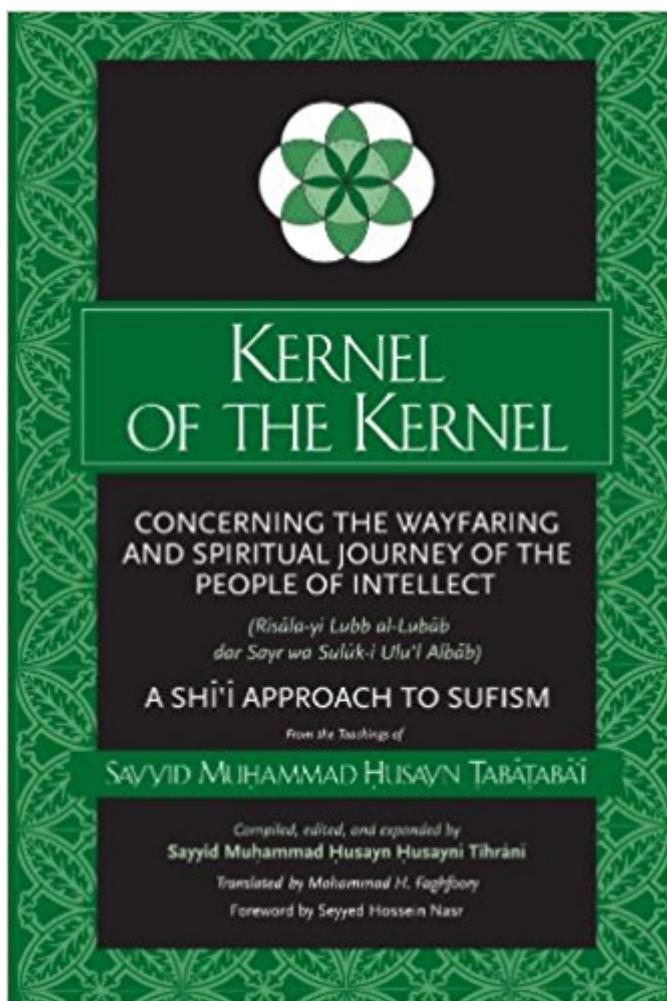


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Kernel Of The Kernel (Suny Series In Islam)



Synopsis

An English translation of a seminal book on Sufism from a Shi'i perspective by an eminent Muslim thinker. *Kernel of the Kernel* is an authoritative work on Sufism from a Shi'i perspective that is not only fascinating, but also contains much practical advice. In addition to providing a theoretical discussion of spiritual wayfaring, it is also the account of a personal fifty-year spiritual journey by Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, a renowned Iranian-Shi'i scholar and spiritual master. In *Kernel of the Kernel*, Tabataba'i discusses the doctrinal foundations of spiritual wayfaring as well as processes and stages that an aspiring wayfarer must go through in order to attain spiritual realization. He discusses the relation between the exoteric and esoteric aspects of Islam and clearly demonstrates that these inward and outward dimensions of Islam complement each other. The book also provides information on the Quranic origins of Sufism and its special relations with Shi'ism as well as the role of Shi'i Imams in the spiritual realization of a sincere wayfarer.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Aside from its historical and theological background, the *Lubb al-Lubab* or *Kernel of the Kernel* stands by itself as a masterpiece in the field of spirituality and gnosis. While naturally couched in the language and terminology of the Quran and Hadith, it conveys a message of universal order meant for all human beings. From the Foreword by Seyyed Hossein Nasr: "Aside from its historical and theological background, the *Lubb al-Lubab* or *Kernel of the Kernel* stands by itself as a masterpiece in the field of spirituality and gnosis. While naturally couched in the language and terminology of the

Quran and Hadith, it conveys a message of universal order meant for all human beings." -- from the Foreword by Seyyed Hossein Nasr

Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i (1901-1982) was a prominent Muslim scholar who taught Islamic philosophy, jurisprudence, ethics, and gnosis in the seminaries of Qum, Iran. He is celebrated for the example of his spiritual life and for his spiritual writings. Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Husayni Tehrani (1925-1995) was one of Tabataba'i's most brilliant students. A teacher, eloquent speaker, and prolific writer, his most important works include comprehensive studies on the nature of God, the lives and spiritual status of Shi'i Imams, and eschatology. Formerly a Professor at the University of Tehran, Mohammad H. Faghfoory is affiliated with George Washington University and the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London.

Great

Good book

This is a fascinating but somewhat repetitive treatise on mysticism, written from a Shia Muslim perspective. The book is written in the form of a commentary by Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Husayni Tehrani on a work by Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabatabai. Both were prominent Shia clerics in Iran. The foreword to the English translation is authored by renowned Traditionalist writer Seyyed Hossein Nasr. This may be seen as controversial, since Nasr supported the Shah, while Tehrani and Tabatabai were followers of Ayatollah Khomeini! But then, the purpose of the work is strictly religious. It's published by SUNY Press. What struck me when reading "Kernel of the Kernel" was the similarity between the Shia mystical path and many others. To a Westerner, parallels with Hinduism are most obvious, since Hindu traditions have been introduced to the West for over a century now. Of course, I'm not talking about the Hindu polytheist pantheon, which all Muslims would denounce, but of the mystical path itself. Perhaps right-handed Tantrism is the closest parallel? The Shia mystic must annihilate his separate personality, becoming completely fused with God. Yet, the mystic nevertheless remains physically present as a human being on the material plane. The Shia Muslim Imams are said to have attained this exalted state, the highest a human can reach. Therefore, the Imams are perfect reflections of God. Comparisons to both Jesus in Christianity and Tantric saints in Hinduism suggest themselves here. The authors emphasize that a mystic must always follow the sharia, but only for the sake of the non-mystical

masses. The mystic himself has moved beyond the sharia. There is a tension in the book at this point, since the mystic is also admonished *not* to follow social conventions, since these may hinder him on the spiritual path. But social conventions in a Muslim society are based on the sharia|The wayfarer (the mystic) needs a teacher (i.e. a guru). The physical teacher, perhaps a shaykh, is eventually replaced by a divine teacher and initiator, usually assumed to be the Twelfth or Hidden Imam, who can appear in mysterious fashion to advanced practitioners. Initially, the mystic sees strange lights and has out-of-body experiences. Later, he attains miraculous powers. (Compare siddhi powers in Hinduism.) All this should be left behind, though, in favor of unquenchable love for union with God. Officially, Shia Islam rejects Sufism, but Sufi-inspired mysticism has survived anyway in the form of a secret gnosis (Irfan) taught only to a select few by high-ranking ayatollahs. Both Tabatabai and Tihanni belonged to this secret initiatic chain. Its initiates study the works of Sufi mystics (and Sunnis) Ibn Arabi, Sadra al-Din Qunawi and al-Fanari. The existence of an esoteric message isn't unique to Shia Islam either, of course. Fear of antinomianism and heresy are some of the reasons why "orthodox" religions keep their mystical traditions under tight wraps. Kernel of the Kernel is heavy reading unless you are extremely interested in Shia Islam's esoteric aspects, or mysticism more generally. While Shia Islam is intensely sectarian (many Shiites would probably find any mention of parallels between their faith and those of Hinduism repugnant, and the Shia-Sunni divide isn't easy to breach either), I suspect that Nasr may have promoted this volume in the hope that it could be used to argue in favor of Gounon's and Schuon's Traditionalism. It also shows that Sunni Sufism and Shiism have interfaced, at least backstage. Perhaps all religions have the same kernel? Four stars.

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