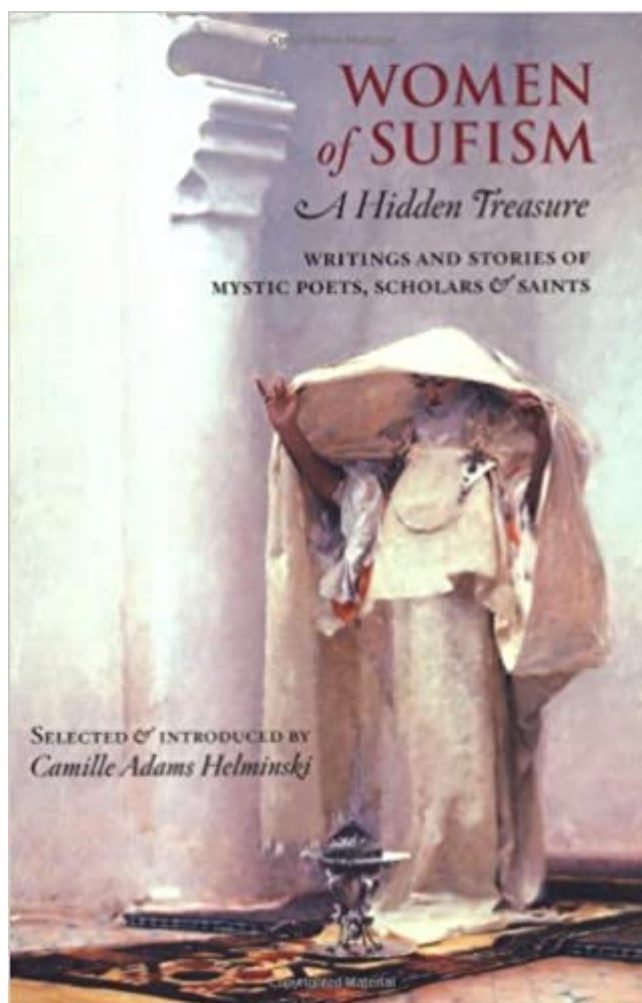


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# Women Of Sufism: A Hidden Treasure



## Synopsis

The luminous presence of women who follow the Sufi Way—the mystical path of Islam—is brought to life here through their sacred songs and poetry, their dreams and visions, and stories of their efforts as they witness the Truth in many realms. These writings reflect the honor and respect for the feminine in the Sufi worldview, and they are shared in the spirit of inspiration and hope for the flourishing contributions of women to the spiritual development of humanity. Spanning the centuries, from the time of the Prophet Muhammad to the present day, the selections are by or about an array of Sufi traditions in different parts of the world, from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East to Europe and America—from beloved members of the Prophet's family to the mystic Rabi'a al-Adawiyya to the modern scholar Annemarie Schimmel. Biographical anecdotes and personal memoirs provide a glimpse into the experience of great saints and contemporary practitioners alike, while providing an introduction to the principles and practices of Sufism.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Helminski was the first woman to publish an English translation of the Qur'an and has built a career out of reprinting classic Sufi materials. This collection of primary sources casts a spotlight on the roles women have played in Sufi history: because Sufism sheds hierarchical and social distinctions in favor of a total consummation with the Beloved (Allah), women have always held an important position, says Helminski. The collection opens with early writings about Sufi women, most of which were written by men, and some of which have only recently been made available in English. Here

we learn of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, an eighth-century saint about whom many legends were composed, and the ninth-century healer Lady Nafisa, who was renowned for her Qur'anic knowledge and whose tomb is still a sacred destination for spiritual pilgrims of many religious traditions. Helminski goes on to offer writings by and about Sufi women up to the present day, including poetry (Rumi has some competition!), folklore, prayers, songs and journal entries. Helminski does a fine job of introducing each subject, placing each shaykha (female teacher) in her historical context and explaining why she should be remembered. Some of the contemporary women are particularly interesting, such as Russian-born Sufi author Irina Tweedie, who describes her gradual path toward Sufism. This collection of women's voices is a rich and varied resource for understanding women of "The Way." Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc.

"A rich and varied resource for understanding women of 'The Way.'" — Publishers Weekly  
"The intensity and the eclectic range of the material is impressive. . . . Women of Sufism: A Hidden Treasure reveals the depth and breadth of spiritual riches within this mystical tradition." — Spirituality & Health  
"An admirable job of bringing history to life . . . a book that can be read with rapture, browsed, used for scholarly reference, or as an inspiring source to deepen our knowledge of Sufism by the examples and teachings of these beautiful and wise Sufi women." — Sufism  
"A great resource for understanding women's ongoing search for the Divine." — Ascent  
"Women of Sufism is a valuable addition to Sufi literature and women's spiritual studies. Camille Helminski awakens us to the important contribution of women to this mystical tradition." — Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, Ph.D., author of Sufism: The Transformation of the Heart

What a gem of a book! This book provides profiles of both historical and contemporary female Sufi practitioners and mystics. Original writings from these women are interspersed whenever possible, and plenty of explanation is provided to help a reader understand Sufi symbolism and rituals. In this way, it serves as both an excellent introduction to Sufism itself, in all its varied lineages, and as an inspiration of feminine spirituality for women of any faith. My personal favorites were portraits of early Sufi saint Rabia Basra, whose humility and devotion were legendary, Umm 'Abdallah whose profound teaching dreams and visions we only know of through her Sufi scholar husband, and the women of the Mevlevi order, contemporaries of Rumi, perhaps the best-known Sufi mystic (certainly the most tweeted!) I highly recommend this for anyone interested in feminine spirituality, historical women mystics, and/or Sufism.

A jewel of a book. Offers a sacred and moving gaze into the inspirational lives of Sufi women throughout time. I was able to experience a feeling of companionship with these blessed women through Camille's portrayal of their stories.

This is a masterpiece on the feminine heart of Sufism: "I was a Hidden Treasure and I loved to be known, so I created the two worlds in order that My treasure of loving kindness and generosity might be known." ~ Hadith Qudsi

I am learning about Sufism. This book is a wonderful resource.

Very nicely done, as is all of Camille's work

still reading

I have just ordered this book upon the recommendation of our teacher Mrs. Cemalnur Sargut, who is an excellent academician and human in sufism and religion. As soon as I will read it I will try to share my thoughts and feelings with all of you. The writer Sheyh Mrs. Camille Helminsky is also a very excellent academician and human in sufism and religion. May God allow us to enter the meanings of them. with lots of love,

I am amazed at how women's spiritual lives from the past keep resurfacing to inspire us today. In *Women of Sufism*, Helminski has selected stories, dreams, prayers and visions of female saints through the ages, from the time of the first Sufi women in the seventh century through to the present day. The stories span the many regions of the world where Sufism has been practised, including Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Europe. The mystic women documented in this anthology weave their spiritual knowledge into their family life, their household tasks, daily actions, and even into their carpets and wall hangings. They are strong in their devotion and let nothing deter them from their personal connection with the Beloved. The stories give a sense of the importance and acceptance of women as teachers. The titles of the chapters are themselves intriguing and give a glimpse of what the stories hold: *A Jewel of Knowledge*, *The Enraptured Ones*, *My Soul is a Woman*, *Mother Love* and *The Fragrance of Prayer* are just a few. The book contains many short, penetrating stories about Rabi'a al-Adawiyya, an eighth-century mystic. In the chapter *A Doorkeeper of the Heart*, one

of my favourite tales illustrates how Rabi'a's saintliness did not depend on showiness: "One day Hasan of Basra saw Rabi'a down by the riverside. He came and sat beside her, spread his prayer-rug on the surface of the water, and said, 'Come sit with me and pray.' 'Do you really have to sell yourself in the market of this world to the consumers of the next?' said Rabi'a. Then she unrolled her own prayer-rug in thin air and sat on it. 'What you can do fish can do, Hasan, and what I did any fly can do. Our real work is beyond the work of fish and flies.'" It is clear from the care people took to write down their dreams that they were important to the Sufis as instruments of the teachings. In this tradition, dreams are considered spiritual realities, often bearing glad tidings and providing a route through which God can communicate with devotees. The chapter Hidden Ways contains the dreams of at-Tirmidhi's wife, which he recorded in his autobiography. The inner link was so strong between husband and wife that she would dream teaching dreams for him. In another chapter, modern-day scholar Michaela Ozelsel documents her experience of a traditional solitary retreat. Isolated in a small apartment in Istanbul with enough supplies to last forty days, she describes how inner peace unfolded and a "polishing of the heart" occurred. Women of Sufism is a great resource for understanding women's ongoing search for the Divine. "It is becoming strongly clear that there will continue to be more and more stories of women of Spirit to share as women in the current era rediscover their rightful role as equal partners on the spiritual path as well as in the world of daily human duties." It is very important that we open to the spiritual knowledge, intelligence and vision of the feminine at this time in history.

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