

SACRED ♦ SPACES

Reflections on a Sufi Path

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Peabody Museum of Archaeology & Ethnology

◆ SUFISM

Sufism, the mystical path of Islam, is an expression of faith in God (“Allah” in Arabic) whose practitioners seek direct, personal experience of the Divine. The movement is believed to have been organized in the seventh and eighth centuries CE, although Sufis themselves may trace their origins directly to the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. Sufism has spread widely throughout the Middle East, Africa, and Central and South Asia.

Sufi practices and traditions vary from strict asceticism and meditation to chanting and recitation of the Qur’an to the performance of ecstatic music and dance. A goal of these practices is to purify the heart and achieve union with God through Divine Love. Sufism is transmitted in many ways, and the teachings of its charismatic spiritual leaders have been passed down through established lineages for hundreds of years.

◆ ISLAMIC CALLIGRAPHY: SACRED WORDS

In a tradition where iconic representations of God are usually forbidden, Arabic calligraphy is esteemed as a visual revelation of the word of God. A calligraphic inscription may consist of a single word, such as “Allah” or “Muhammad,” a verse or phrase, or a word repeated and arranged into patterns in a wonderfully creative blend of language and geometry. Combining harmonious design with declarations of faith, calligraphy is one of the most respected and consummate Islamic art forms.

◆ SUFI ARCHITECTURE: SACRED SPACES

In the South Asian subcontinent today, practitioners of all faiths make pilgrimages to the shrines of Sufi saints and master teachers. Built over the earthly remains of these great Sufis as an act of devotion by their followers, the shrines are thought to embody the spiritual presence of the saints. They are sacred places of pilgrimage, meditation, prayer, and ritual devotion.



Companion book *Sacred Spaces: A Journey with the Sufis of the Indus*. Peabody Museum Press.
Companion exhibition at Harvard's Sackler Museum *Sacred Spaces: The World of Dervishes, Fakirs, and Sufis*.

Pakistani artist Samina Quraeshi's mixed-media compositions are inspired by the Sufi traditions of the Indus Valley and draw on the multilayered symbolic and visual resources of South Asia. She is the first recipient of the Peabody Museum's Robert Gardner Visiting Artist Fellowship.