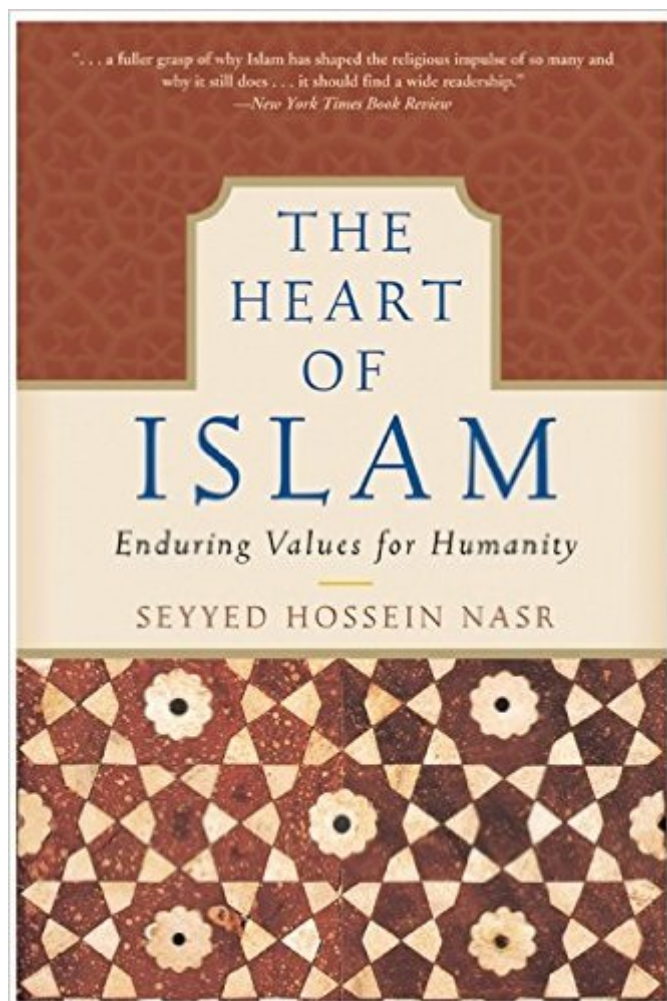


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The Heart Of Islam: Enduring Values For Humanity



Synopsis

As the specter of religious extremism has become a fact of life today, the temptation is great to allow the evil actions and perspectives of a minority to represent an entire tradition. In the case of Islam, there has been much recent confusion in the Western world centered on distorted portrayals of its core values. Born of ignorance, such confusion feeds the very problem at hand. In *The Heart of Islam* one of the great intellectual figures in Islamic history offers a timely presentation of the core spiritual and social values of Islam: peace, compassion, social justice, and respect for the other. Seizing this unique moment in history to reflect on the essence of his tradition, Seyyed Hossein Nasr seeks to "open a spiritual and intellectual space for mutual understanding." Exploring Islamic values in scripture, traditional sources, and history, he also shows their clear counterparts in the Jewish and Christian traditions, revealing the common ground of the Abrahamic faiths. Nasr challenges members of the world's civilizations to stop demonizing others while identifying themselves with pure goodness and to turn instead to a deeper understanding of those shared values that can solve the acute problems facing humanity today. "Muslims must ask themselves what went wrong within their own societies," he writes, "but the West must also pose the same question about itself . . . whether we are Muslims, Jews, Christians, or even secularists, whether we live in the Islamic world or in the West, we are in need of meaning in our lives, of ethical norms to guide our actions, of a vision that would allow us to live at peace with each other and with the rest of God's creation." Such help, he believes, lies at the heart of every religion and can lead the followers of the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) as well as other religious and spiritual traditions to a new future of mutual respect and common global purpose. *The Heart of Islam* is a landmark presentation of enduring value that offers hope to humanity, and a compelling portrait of the beauty and appeal of the faith of 1.2 billion people.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I've read all the previous reviews on this book, and I was surprised to find what I consider to be the major message of this book overlooked by all the reviews. First of all, let me say that I found this to be an excellent, elegant exposition of just what the title indicates - the "Heart of Islam." Professor Nasr explains better than any other writer I have ever read just what things like love and justice mean to Muslim inner life. On the one hand, he was addressing the post 9/11 world, and attempting to nurture a sense of balance about what the terrorist attacks meant, from a mainstream Muslim perspective. That believers of religions do not always live up to the ideals expressed by their faith is nothing new, and Professor Nasr certainly isn't trying to deny that. But another major point - one suggested by the subtitle "Enduring Values for Humanity", and one that has taken on a more serious demeanor since 9/11 - was Professor Nasr's attempt to show that Islam, as a society, sees itself as threatened by secularism and globalism, which are basically western creations which western society has assumed, without any really good reason, to have a universal application, and which western governments, from the beginning of the imperialist period up to the present, have foisted on the Middle East, theoretically in its own good.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr may not be the most well-known Muslim author in the West, but that is to our detriment. This Iranian-born philosopher is clearly one of the more compelling voices in his faith and one which should be heard much more often. "The Heart of Islam" is, as the title suggests, another book which sets out to explain the basics of Islam for a Western audience. What sets this one apart from the rest - totally aside from Nasr's abilities as a writer - is the fact that the same author has to his credit "The Young Muslim's Guide To The West". Nasr, it would seem, is quite gifted at explaining cultures to each other. The basics of the religion are all present and correct. In fact, as a specialist in the field, I find that Nasr's outline of the basics is often superior to many other authors as he breaks down the various types of action (permissible, forbidden and so on) with scriptural examples - which is a feature very few books have. If all you're after is a quick run through the basics, though, the Five Pillars and so on are more than covered here. There is also a well-argued piece on jihad, that area of Muslim doctrine which is so easily misunderstood. For the beginner, however, "Heart of Islam" may not be the best book to buy. Nasr's style of writing is a little too

literary at times and his approach to various aspects of his religion is slightly more mystical than perhaps it should be. I understand that he describes himself as something of a Sufi, which would also explain the prominence he gives the Sufi concepts of "tariqa" and the like. This is not to say that Sufism should be ignored totally, but there is a risk of losing perspective with the structure Nasr has adopted here.

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