THE NEW YORK OPEN CENTER AND THE MUHYIDDIN IBN ‘ARABI SOCIETY
PRESENT

ISLAM, SUFISM AND THE HEART OF COMPASSION
Living the Teachings of Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi
A CONFERENCE

Friday–Saturday,
November 6 & 7

William C. Chittick
Stephen Hirtenstein
Salman Bashier
Sachiko Murata
Mohamed Haj Yousef

A conference co-sponsored with:
The Riverside Church
Middle East Institute
Columbia University
WBAI 99.5 FM
“My heart has become capable of all forms. It is a meadow for gazelles and a monastery for Christian monks, a temple for idols and the pilgrim’s Ka‘aba, the Tables of the Law and the book of the Koran. I profess the religion of Love, and whatever direction its steed may take, Love is my religion and my faith”

— Ibn ‘Arabi

This groundbreaking event, held at the beautiful Gothic cathedral of the historic interdenominational Riverside Church, will explore the wisdom and contemporary relevance of the 13th century mystic and teacher Ibn ‘Arabi, who is considered the greatest master of Gnostic and philosophical Sufism.

It will bring together some of the world’s leading Ibn ‘Arabi scholars, and will include talks, workshops, Sufi musicians from the US and the UK, poetry, and three films presented by the award-winning Tunisian director, Nacer Khemir. The conference will include presentations such as: Ibn ‘Arabi and the Quest for Human Perfection; How Ibn al-Arabi’s Mystical Love Can Overcome Fundamentalism; Ibn ‘Arabi in Dialogue with the Confucian Tradition, and much more.

Ibn ‘Arabi was born in Medieval Spain, then home to an extraordinarily enlightened culture of religious tolerance among Muslims, Jews and Christians, a period that can serve us today as an inspiring example of the possibility of fruitful co-existence and cooperation among different cultures. As one of history’s greatest universal mystics and interpreters of the human condition, Ibn ‘Arabi’s teachings can offer us a window into a form of Islam that we in the West are rarely exposed to, as well as a more sophisticated understanding of the more exalted aspects of the Islamic cultural heritage.

Please join us for this exceptional presentation of cross-cultural dialogue and come deepen your awareness of the very important part of the Islamic tradition that is one of humanity’s richest veins of mystical spirit and ecstatic beauty.

Cover photo: Grand Mosque, Cordoba, Spain by Stephen Hirtenstein
**Plenary: The Anthropology of Compassion**

*Ibn 'Arabi and the Quest for Human Perfection*

William C. Chittick, PhD

Ibn 'Arabi's teachings on compassion, as on other topics, need to be situated in the "spiritual anthropology" that forms the backdrop of his work. In this session, one of the greatest American Ibn 'Arabi scholars who has spent 40 years studying the great mystic's legacy will explore what Ibn 'Arabi's teachings tell us about the relationship between compassion and the quest for human perfection. Can such an exalted goal really be actualized in the course of a human lifetime?

**Workshop: The Anthropology of Compassion in Ibn 'Arabi's Futuhat**

William C. Chittick, PhD

In this workshop, we will look closely at a few seminal texts from Ibn 'Arabi's 560-chapter magnum opus, al-Futuhat al-makkiyya (a work that is often neglected because of its length and which was deeply informed by a vision he had near the Ka'ba in Mecca), in which he deals extensively with compassion. We will explore how Ibn 'Arabi's views on the centrality of compassion fit into the broader context of Islamic and Sufi teachings.

**Session I: Workshop AA02**

*William C. Chittick, PhD, Professor of Religious Studies in the Asian and Asian American Studies Dept. at Stony Brook, has spent forty years studying Ibn 'Arabi and the pre-modern Muslim intellectual tradition. Among his thirty books, five deal with Ibn Arabi's thought: The Sufi Path of Knowledge, Imaginal Worlds, The Self, Disclosure of God, Ibn Arabi: Heir to the Prophets, and (as co-author) The Meccan Revelations.*

**Plenary: The Mystic’s Ka’ba**

*The Wisdom of the Heart According to Ibn ’Arabi*

Stephen Hirtenstein, MA

“The greatest crime is that which kills the heart, and nothing kills it but lack of knowledge of God.” — Ibn ’Arabi

The Ka’ba, the cube-shaped building in Mecca, is the most sacred site in Islam, representing the center of the world where heaven and earth meet. Muslims direct their prayers to it five times a day, no matter where they are, and during pilgrimage, it is circumambulated by vast throngs. Likewise, the human heart is viewed as the most sacred core of a person, not only as a physical organ but as the “seat” of the spirit, the place that “contains” the Divine. This talk will explore some of the many ramifications of the heart in Ibn ’Arabi’s teachings, as the Ka’ba of our being.

**Workshop: In the Footsteps of the Master**

*The Life and Times of Ibn ’Arabi*

Stephen Hirtenstein, MA

This illustrated talk will describe Ibn ’Arabi’s life story through the places that he knew and the people he met. Ibn ’Arabi was a tremendous traveler, both spiritually and physically: his life spanned three great Islamic cultures, from the Almohads of al-Andalus (today’s Andalusia in Spain) to the Levant of the Ayyubids (sons of Saladin) to the great Seljuk Empire of Anatolia (modern Turkey). We will let him tell his story through his own words as much as possible, describing episodes from his outer and inner life, and showing how even his outer life became a teaching, an illustration of how to live. We will also be investigating some of the implications that his teachings have for us in the present day.

**Session I: Workshop AA01**

*Stephen Hirtenstein, MA, the editor of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society's Journal since its inception in 1982 and co-founder of Anqa Publishing, is the author of The Unlimited Mercifier, a spiritual biography of Ibn 'Arabi, and co-translator of two treatises by Ibn 'Arabi, Divine Sayings and The Seven Days of the Heart. (www.ibnarabisociety.org)*
Between Annihilation and Subsistence
Ibn al-Arabi’s God of Compassion versus Fundamentalist Nihilism
Salman Bashier, PhD
Salman Bashier is an advocate of a dialogue between Islamic and Western thought, and he feels that the rich tradition and practice of Islamic mysticism can play a key role in countering the destructive aspects of modern fundamentalism, something that has not been sufficiently recognized by scholars or policy makers. In this talk, he will focus on Ibn al-Arabi’s philosophy as a tool for examining the roots of Islamic fundamentalism in the context of both other fundamentalisms and other currents in modern Islam.

Workshop: How Ibn al-Arabi’s Mystical Love Can Overcome Fundamentalism
Salman Bashier, PhD
Ibn al-Arabi lived in the 13th century, but his strain of mysticism is very much a living tradition that is as relevant as ever, especially as a compassionate counterweight to religious fundamentalism. In this workshop, Salman Bashier will explore which thinkers in the modern intellectual tradition can be good candidates for a careful but serious and responsible comparative study to bring Ibn al-Arabi’s philosophy closer to the minds and hearts of modern society.

Session I: Workshop ABO2

Ibn ‘Arabi in Dialogue with the Confucian Tradition
Sachiko Murata, PhD
When Chinese Muslims began in the 17th century to write about their ancestral religion in their native language—that is, Chinese—they produced a body of literature that is a synthesis of the Neo-Confucian and Islamic worldviews. On the Islamic side, they drew largely from Sufi teachers in the lineage of Ibn ‘Arabi. Sachiko Murata, one of the great specialists of this insufficiently known but fascinating syncretic tradition at the crossroads of two great civilizations, shares her insights about this unique religious culture and how two such seemingly different approaches to life as passionate Sufi mysticism and Confucian discipline can coexist.

Workshop: Ibn ‘Arabi and the Confucian Tradition
Sachiko Murata, PhD
In this workshop, we will delve deeper into the little known but remarkable intellectual and spiritual hybrid—Chinese Islam viewed through a Confucian prism, by exploring a few of the cosmological and psychological diagrams drawn up by Liu Zhi, an early 18th century Chinese Muslim scholar from Nanjing who was the most influential representative of the Huiru (Muslim Confucianist) school. Liu Zhi viewed his great work as revealing the underlying unity of Islamic (especially its Sufi variants) and Confucian ideas, which he viewed as the best of the East and West in his era.

Session II: Workshop ABO3

Ibn ‘Arabi – the Treasury of Absolute Mercy
Mohamed Haj Yousef, PhD
Ibn ‘Arabi’s work contains some very extensive descriptions of his cosmology, his understandings of creation and of the universe. One subject upon which he places perhaps the most emphasis is the central importance of mercy and compassion—he often states that the world originated from absolute mercy and to mercy it would return and that any pain or agony is therefore purely temporary. He felt that Allah had made him a “treasury of mercy” so that he could remain absolutely merciful despite his knowledge of hardness and suffering. Join Professor Yousef, a great specialist in Ibn ‘Arabi’s cosmology, as he explores with us this crucial aspect of Ibn ‘Arabi’s model of creation.

Workshop: Ibn ‘Arabi’s View of the Cosmos
Mohamed Haj Yousef, PhD
Ibn ‘Arabi’s model of the cosmos is based upon his controversial theory of the “oneness of being,” in which he affirms that all the visible forms in the cosmos are being perpetually created by a single entity he calls the “single monad” that keeps bringing these forms into existence. The discussion may be directed towards exploring the different aspects of Ibn ‘Arabi’s view of the cosmos and its origins, and how one can reconcile the visible multiplicity of our material world with the oneness and uniqueness of the creator.

Session II: Workshop ABO1

Mohamed Haj Yousef, PhD studied physics in Syria and at Cambridge and had an academic career teaching the subject, but has had a second career as a scholar of Ibn ‘Arabi and has written several books including Ibn Arabi-Time and Cosmology and Shams-al-Mageeb (in Arabic). In addition, he runs a website about Ibn ‘Arabi - www.ibnalarabi.com, and teaches at United Arab Emirates University.

Sachiko Murata, PhD completed a PhD in Persian literature at Tehran University in 1971 and was the first woman and the first non-Muslim to enroll in its theology department where she obtained a degree in Islamic jurisprudence. Since 1983 she has taught religious studies at Stony Brook and has published many scholarly articles as well as several books, including: The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought, and Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light.
Music, Poetry and Film

Evening of Friday, November 6
Tarjumân al-Aswâq
Poetry written by Ibn ‘Arabi
Performed in Arabic by Taoufiq Ben Amor
Performed in English by Aaron Cass

The Tarjuman al-Aswâq or “Interpreter of Ardent Desires” by Ibn ‘Arabi is acknowledged as one of the major works of Sufi literature, alongside those of the great Persian poets Attar, Jalaluddin Rumi, Hafiz and Jami. It comprises 61 love poems with full commentary on the esoteric meaning of human love.

Taoufiq Ben Amor is a Tunisian vocalist, percussionist and oud player. For the last two decades, Taoufiq has been an active performer, educator and producer in the US and Canada. He is the founder of two music ensembles: Tarab and Ayyoub. He produced the music series at the Alwan Center for The Arts in New York City 2003-2008. Taoufiq is currently Senior Lecturer in Arabic Studies at Columbia University.

Aaron Cass is an actor, musician, composer and co-founder of the Vastearth Orchestra with whom he has produced two albums of classical Middle Eastern poetry set to music, “Green Bird” and “A Garden Amidst the Flames.” The music composed is based on and inspired by the readings from Ibn ‘Arabi. The group performs nationally in the UK.

Tarab Ensemble

Tarab, founded in 1998, is a group of New York-based musicians who perform the classical Arabic repertoire, with a special emphasis on the Andalusi Muwashah and Sufi repertoire. Since its foundation, Tarab has performed at several venues which include Symphony Space, Cooper Union, The Joseph Papp Theater, and several universities. www.taoufiqbenamor.com.

Post-Conference Events

Presentations by Tunisian Filmmaker
Nacer Khemir

Nacer Khemir is an award-winning Tunisian filmmaker whose works include “Wanderers of the Desert,” awarded the Grand Prix of the Festival des Trois Continents, “The Dove’s Lost Necklace,” which won the Special Jury Prize at the prestigious Locarno Film Festival in 1991, and, most recently, “Bab’Aziz.” We are delighted to be able to bring you the director in person and all three of his most famous films, “Bab’Aziz” on Saturday and the other two on Sunday. Nacer Khemir will introduce his films and will answer questions following the showings on both days.

“Wanderers of the Desert”

This gentle, lyrical drama about a new teacher’s arrival in a village school in the middle of the desert combines realistic slice-of-life portraits of the day-to-day in the Middle East with startling fantasy and mythical elements that pull from centuries of indigenous lore and legends to give the story a shimmering magical realist quality. (95 minutes)

“Bab’Aziz-The Prince Who Contemplated His Soul”

A visual poem of incomparable beauty, this masterpiece presents a radically different view of Islamic culture than the one usually depicted in our media. Filmed in Tunisia and Iran and filled with breathtaking images, this profound fairytale shows us the tolerant, friendly, and loving aspects of open-hearted desert dwellers and their ancient storytelling traditions. (96 minutes)

“The Dove’s Lost Necklace”

This fairy tale includes a young man, an ancient manuscript that may hold the secrets of love, a monkey who may be an enchanted prince, wars, false prophets, ancient curses, and a beautiful princess from Samarkand. (90 minutes)

Saturday, November 7, 8pm
09SS15P/$9 (included in conference fee)
Includes talk and Q & A with director
Note: There will be a French-English translator present for interpreting audience questions and the director’s answers.

Sunday, November 8, 1 pm
0922216P/Double Feature $18 (These films are not included in conference fee.)
0922219P/Attending all three films $24
Talk and Q & A with the director: 4:30 pm

All films will be screened at The Middle East Institute at Columbia University, Altschul Auditorium (at street level) 420 West 118th Street (off Amsterdam Ave)

Post-Conference Events

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Conference Schedule

Location: Riverside Church of New York
Friday – Saturday Assembly Hall

Friday, November 6

Introduction: New York Open Center / Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society
6 pm

Keynote Speaker: The Anthropology of Compassion: Ibn ‘Arabi and the Quest for Human Perfection
William C. Chittick

Poetry recitation from the Tarjamun by Ibn ‘Arabi in Arabic
Taoufiq Ben Amor

Poetry recitation from the Tarjamun by Ibn ‘Arabi in English
Aaron Cass

Tarab Musical Ensemble

Saturday, November 7

Prayers Offered by Clergy
9 am – 12 pm

Morning Plenaries
Assembly Hall

The Mystic’s Ka’ba: the Wisdom of the Heart According to Ibn ‘Arabi
Stephen Hirtenstein

Ibn ‘Arabi – the Treasury of Absolute Mercy
Mohamed Haj Yousef

— Break —

Saturday Evening 4:30 pm – 6 pm

Panel Discussion – The relevance of Ibn ‘Arabi in our time
Musical performance by Aaron Cass and His Ensemble

Conference Organizers

New York Open Center – E. Aracely Brown, Conference Director
Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society – Nick Yiangou, Jane Carroll, and Stephen Hirtenstein, Program Directors

Co-Sponsors
Riverside Church of New York
The Middle East Institute at Columbia University
WBAI 99.5 FM Pacifica Radio

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Seven Pillars House of Wisdom — www.sevenpillarshouse.org
Sufi News and World Report — www.sufinews.blogspot.com
Sufi Books — www.sufibooks.com

Post-Conference Events

Saturday, November 7
8 pm
Film and Q&A with Director, Nacer Khemir
Film: “Bab’Aziz: The Prince Who Contemplated His Soul”
Open to general public: $9*

Sunday, November 8
1 pm
Two Films and Q&A with Director, Nacer Khemir
Films: “Wanderers of the Desert” and “The Dove’s Lost Necklace”
Two Films: $18  All Three Films: $24*

*All films to be screened at The Middle East Institute at Columbia University
Altschuhl Auditorium (at street level) 420 West 118th Street (off Amsterdam Ave)
Conference Fee
(Pre-registration is recommended)
$125, Early Bird price by October 8
$145, after October 8,
Group Rates apply to the full price of $145 only.
Call for student discounts.
The conference fee includes the full conference programs.
Friday and Saturday, and the Saturday night film presentation.

Workshop Sessions I and II

Session I
AA01. In the Footsteps of the Master: The Life and Times of Ibn ‘Arabi
Stephen Hirtenstein
AA02. The Anthropology of Compassion in Ibn ‘Arabi’s Futuhat
William C. Chittick

Session II
AB01. Ibn ‘Arabi’s View of the Cosmos
Mohoamed Haj Yousef
AB02. How Ibn Al-Arabi’s Mystical Love Can Overcome Fundamentalism
Salman Bashier
AB03. Ibn ‘Arabi and the Confucian Tradition
Sachiko Murata
Select one option for each session.

Location
Riverside Church of New York
91 Claremont Avenue
New York, NY 10027

Traveling to Site
Take the IRT Broadway Express #2 or #3 uptown to 96th Street, then change at 96th Street to the #1 Broadway local to 116th Street.
Walk north on Broadway (passing Barnard College on the left-hand side of the street) to 120th Street (Reinhold Niebuhr Place).
Turn left on the corner of 120th Street and walk one block west to Claremont Avenue.
On the corner of 120 Street and Claremont, walk half a block north to 91 Claremont (keep to the left-hand side of the street). There will be two main doors in the middle of the block, this is the entrance to the conference.
For other travel directions by bus and car, see www.opencenter.org/ibn-arabi or go to www.theriversidechurchny.org.

Refunds
Refunds are available minus a processing fee of $15 if you cancel up to two weeks prior to the first day of the program. Course credits are available minus a processing fee of $15 if you cancel up to 48 hours prior to the first day of the program. Course credit is valid for one year, and may be applied to memberships or courses by pre-registration only. Any processing of a refund or credit is pending until you receive notice that the Registration Department has received your request and deemed it valid.

To register visit: www.opencenter.org/ibn-arabi
or call 212-219-2527 x 2

“Oneness is an ocean and a shore: the shore can be communicated, the ocean cannot; the shore can be known, the ocean can only be experienced.”
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“The movement which is the existence of the universe is the movement of love.”
– Ibn ‘Arabi

For the latest articles, news and general updates visit: www.opencenter.org/ibn-arabi