

The Little Book of Sufi Stories: Ancient Wisdom to Nourish the Heart

Neil Douglas-Klotz

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The Little Book of Sufi Stories collects more than forty ancient tales and puts a modern spin on them.

Several of the most memorable stories involve Mullah Nasruddin, a “wise fool” who appears in stories throughout the Middle East, Central Asia, and East Asia. In one well-known example, he assures a man that a huge sum of money is only a single coin to Allah, who will gladly give him that coin...in a second. The Nasruddin stories often involve him getting one over on others through creating misunderstandings, and they feel both familiar and witty.

“The Hunchback of Ch’ang-an,” originally part of *One Thousand and One Arabian Nights*, is a dark comedy about the untimely death of the titular hunchback. Over a series of stories, responsibility for his demise passes from one character to another, until all the potentially guilty parties are brought to trial. Similar reversal-of-fortune stories involve a man trying his hand at astrology and accidentally making some key predictions, or a junkman hiding money he discovered through an even more elaborate ruse.

Figures of shared religious traditions pop up too. The book retells the story of Jonah (Yunus here, or “the man of the big fish”), from his first conversation with an unseen voice to his post-fish life in Nineveh. Several stories about Jesus (or Issa) feature him trying to understand his capabilities. In one, he resurrects a man’s wife but learns that she isn’t the same. In another, he accidentally kills his teachers by showing his advanced intellect, and his mother makes him bring them back.

Neil Douglas-Klotz represents these stories as if he’s telling them live, giving the work an immediacy and charm that makes its centuries-old tales relatable. *The Little Book of Sufi Stories* is an enjoyable collection.

JEFF FLEISCHER (Religion 2018)

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