



## The Book of Illumination *Including* The Sign of Success on the Spiritual Path: Kitab al-Tanwir fi Isqat al-Tadbir

By Shaykh Ahmad Ibn 'Ata' Allah Al-Iskandari

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Presenting a mystical and theological analysis of our human urge to create idols for ourselves and out of ourselves, this medieval author carefully recounts the enlightening counsels of his own masters. He is most attentive to the subtle psychological working of our human ego, marshaling resources for his Islamic tradition that can confront and overcome it. The result of desisting from claiming as our right and ability what is clearly beyond our control is illumination of the heart, clarity of the mind, and tranquility of the soul. This new translation masterfully illustrates the goal of Ibn Ata' Allah's discussion of achieving inner illumination of the heart, which is close to the sense of "enlightenment" that has become common in English language discussions of spirituality and gnosis.

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## **Editorial Review**

From Publishers Weekly

Though written by a medieval Sufi master in North Africa in the late 13th century, this classic Islamic text is as relevant today as ever, arguing as it does that human selfishness and consumption can kill the soul. Kugle, who teaches at Swarthmore, suggests that a rough English translation of the title might be *The Book of Illumination for Desisting from Selfish Calculation*, because the text "invites us gently on a journey into self-critique, in order to reduce our needs and restrain our craving." Shaykh Ibn 'Ata' Allah offers a surprisingly practical text, one that distinguishes between saving and hoarding, for example, or exhorts readers to cleave to God and community rather than relying only on themselves. But he does this in profoundly theological ways, emphasizing the ephemeral and frail nature of humanity when compared to God's benevolent power. As with many Sufi mystical texts, this one can sometimes seem difficult to understand or rife with paradox. However, readers will be rewarded by a message of humility, devotion and economy that is both timeless and timely.

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From the Back Cover

"[The Book of Illumination] is the epitome of all the books, long or short, on Sufism." – Ibn 'Abbad of Ronda

"This superb translation of a classic work of Islamic spirituality is sure to transform hearts and shape intellects. Scott Kugle has done a masterful job of rendering this text into a highly accurate and readable language. Students of all spiritual traditions will find sustenance here." – Omid Safi, Professor of Islamic Studies, Colgate

"A unique, lucid, and at times lyrical translation of a long-awaited foundational work of Sufism. Kugle's non-gendered approach will stimulate an important and lively discussion of the place of theology in the understanding of Islamic texts." – Vincent J. Cornell, Ph.D., Professor of History, Director, King Fahd Center for Middle East and Islamic Studies, Chair of Religious Studies, University of Arkansas

Regarding the methodology of overcoming self-preoccupation and fear for one's sustenance, it is hard to imagine that we, of today, could "literally" sit as disciples in the presence of a spiritual giant though he lived nearly 1000 years ago, and hear a saint of such magnitude as Ibn 'Ata' Allah carefully recount the enlightening counsels of his own masters (Abul Hasan al-Shadhili, the "Axial Saint" of the 12th century and Shaykh al-Mursi who continued the lineage) as well as renowned Sufis such as Abdul Qadir Jilani and Abu Madyan.

Quoting al-Jilani, the Shaykh says, "My brothers and sisters, I did not arrive in union with God by staying awake all night in worship, by staying aware all day fasting, or by staying engrossed learning knowledge! Rather, I arrived at union with God by generosity and humility and letting my breast be at peace." He adds, a Sufi master has said, "How do you expect to enter into God's presence when something behind you is dragging you back..." Then Ibn 'Ata' Allah goes on to present ways in which the "whole heart" is realized fully in one's life and how we shift our attention away from being overly self-preoccupied and endlessly absorbed in self-directed calculation into a state of utter trust.

About the Author

**Shaykh Ahmad Ibn 'Ata' Allah Al-Iskandari**, one of the greatest spiritual masters of the thirteenth century, was both a Muhaddith and a Maliki jurist whose works became basic training manuals for aspirants across North Africa. A student of al-Mursi, he was the second to succeed Imam Abul-Hasan, the founder of the Shadhili Order, which continues to this day. His work made an inestimable contribution to elucidating the principles and practices of Sufism.

**Scott Kugle** is a professor at Swarthmore College.

## **Users Review**

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