
With Dialogue Comes Understanding: Book by Amira El-Zein Offers New Insights Into Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr



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Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr

As a young scholar and poet at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., Dr. Amira El-Zein found herself drawn to the work of Dr. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, a philosopher now recognized as one of the most influential Islamic scholars of the century. But it wasn't until she finished *Religion and the Order of Nature* that she felt compelled to meet the man. "It was a book that spoke to my soul and my understanding of the universe," she explained. "I walked the 20 minutes to his office at George Washington University, and I found his door open."

What began as an impromptu visit soon grew into an intellectual companionship that would span decades and continents, culminating in one of the most critical explications of Nasr's work to date:

[*Return to the Eternal Abode: Sufi Dialogues with Seyyed Hossein Nasr*](#) (SUNY Press 2025).

Through a series of conversations inspired by questions Dr. El-Zein had been pursuing as a poet, translator, and scholar of Arabic literature, she captured Nasr's views on the mystical dimensions of Islam (*Tassawuf* or Sufism) and its intersections with art, cosmology, the environment, and modernity. The volume not only elucidates Nasr's vast body of work but also contains new

insights—his reflections on creativity and his views of twentieth-century philosophers of metaphysics and mysticism.

Dr. Nasr lecturing on “[Islam and Preserving the Natural Environment](#)” at GU-Q during the early days of his conversations with Dr. El-Zein

What emerges from the book is more than a summative look at the influential philosopher’s works; it is a testament to what can happen when two seekers of knowledge meet and dare to challenge each other. “We didn’t always agree,” Dr. El-Zein admitted, “but often he would say something, and I would take it further.”

The key takeaways of *Return to the Eternal Abode* are both timeless and urgent: That creativity is inseparable from the sacred; that nature must be seen not as a resource to be consumed, but as a living text to be read with reverence; that Islamic philosophy, far from being insular, is conversant with centuries of philosophical and religious traditions from around the world.

Over the course of her career, Dr. El-Zein has published extensively, including *Creativity and the Sacred* (2016), *Islam, Arabs, and the Intelligent World of the Jinn* (2009), and co-edited *Culture, Creativity, and Exile*, as well as several volumes of poetry in Arabic, French, and English.

However, it is this book that remains close to her heart. “Every book is unfinished business, and this one will continue for me in poetry, in fiction, in teaching, and in the ways we pass knowledge forward,” she reflected. At Georgetown University in Qatar, she carries that spirit of dialogue into

her classrooms, inviting students to experience literature as a living conversation—between traditions, ideas, past and present. “Each class is a creation,” she said. “We discover the text together, and then we go beyond it.”