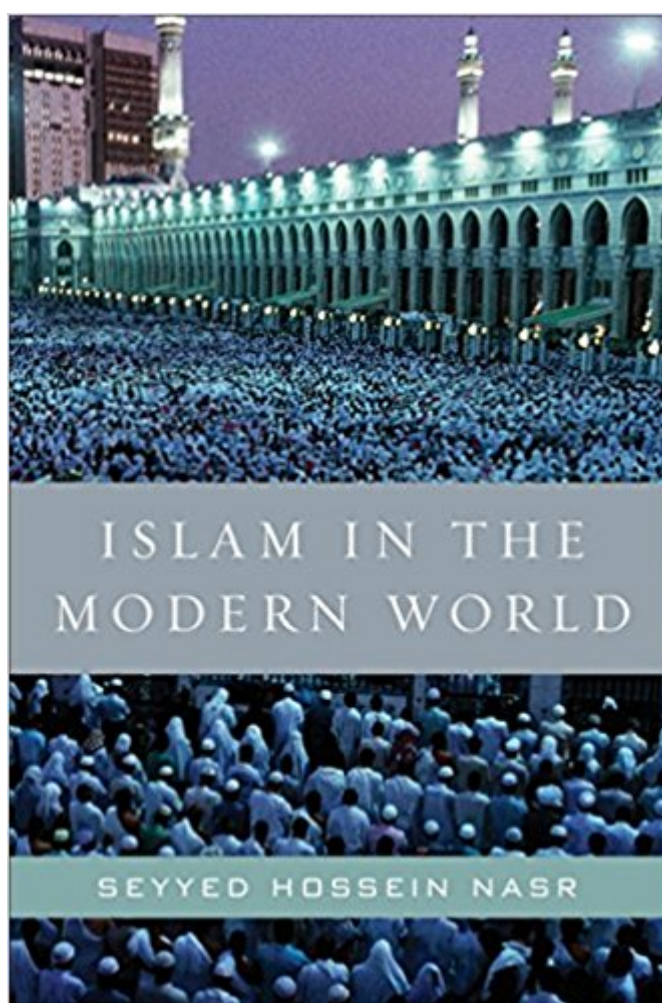


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# Islam In The Modern World: Challenged By The West, Threatened By Fundamentalism, Keeping Faith With Tradition



## Synopsis

The foremost U.S. authority on Islam and, Seyyed Hossein Nasr discusses today's hot button issues including holy wars, women's rights, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, and the future of Moslems in the Middle East in this groundbreaking discussion of the fastest-growing religion in the world. One of the great scholars in the modern Islamic intellectual tradition, and the acclaimed author of books such as *The Garden of Truth* and *The Heart of Islam*, Nasr brings incomparable insight to this exploration of Muslim issues and realities, delivering a landmark publication promoting cross-cultural awareness and world peace.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Nasr, one of the world's foremost scholars of Islam, here updates one of his classic works in response to the major changes in the Islamic world (and its relationship with the non-Islamic world) that have occurred since the text was last revised in 1990. At its core is the tension between traditional Islam, the worldview defined by the equilibrium promulgated by the Shari'ah and the serenity of Islamic spirituality and expressed through traditional Islamic philosophy, science, art, and architecture, and the disunities and profanities of secular modernism that are the norm in the Western world and now pervade much of the Islamic world as well. In rejecting and critiquing modernism, Nasr argues, traditional Islam retains its rich spiritual vitality despite the challenges it faces from within and without. Among the greatest of these challenges is that presented by Islamic fundamentalism and violent radicalism, which, says Nasr, claim to reflect traditional Islam but have actually been profoundly corrupted by some of the modern West's ugliest attributes. Though

passionately argued, this book is essentially an argument for the primacy of a particularly orthodox approach to Islamic faith and as such may not resonate with those inclined toward other Islamic beliefs. It does, however, provide an erudite and unusually accessible look into the ongoing struggle for the heart of Islam. --Brendan Driscoll --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

• An erudite and unusually accessible look into the ongoing struggle for the heart of Islam. •  
(Booklist)

Just getting into it, but I think I am going to benefit from it...THANK YOU

good

"Islam in the Modern World" by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (first ed. c. 1990, but extensively revised, updated & with new chapters: hardback 2010), 472 pgs. Nasr is known for writing books contending that Islam is a moderate, peaceful religion. Does this mean we need to ignore what he has to say? Perhaps there is some knowledge, if not just 'factoids' to be learned from him. What strove Nasr to update this book was due to: "Only during the past few decades has a new phenomenon appeared that necessitates distinguishing rigorously between traditional Islam and not only modernism, but also that spectrum of feeling... that has come to be identified... as 'fundamentalist', revivalist, or 'activist' Islam." Nasr contends that the 1990s-2000s-era 'revivalist' (jihadist) groups "that speak of reviving Islam in opposition to modernism and Western civilization" (p. 2) misunderstand non-violent Islam. However, Nasr doesn't go into any depth in detailing the militant activities of any particular 'terrorist' jihadist group (i.e., al-Qaeda). Despite his opposition to jihadism, Nasr doesn't go into detail in stating what he has against militant jihadism besides its violence (not all Muslims have to be violence-prone). This book provides a generic background history of Muslims and the Islamic religion. The author discusses the differences in Islamic theology, science and spirituality (Sufism). Nasr is fond of the past 'achievements' of Islamic architecture and science, but acknowledges that the West overtook Islamic in science and economic achievements starting in the 17th century. There are several appendices in which Nasr lists 'milestone' books written by medieval Muslims regarding architecture, philosophy, science, theology, etc. Nasr contends that while the West thinks it has overtaken Muslims in industrial and intellectual development, Nasr argues that rather than compete against the modern world the Muslim world decided to 'lay back' as its "Islamic science [theology]

possesses a [religious] message that is of more than historical interest" (p. 147). Essentially, Nasr argues that the spiritual message of Islam is more important than the material wealth achieved by the West; a thought that is reflected in his book's subtitle: "Challenged by the West, threatened by Fundamentalism, keeping faith with Tradition". Nasr is fond of Islam's past educational "achievements", but he doesn't dwell on examining why there are so few current Islamic Nobel Prize winners. Nasr looks at Islam as it developed in the 10-11-12th centuries for guidance as to how Islam is going to enhance the lifestyles of Muslims in the 21st Century, but he doesn't really present convincing arguments. Nostalgia has its place, but really, a chapter on: "Islamic Art and its Spiritual Significance in the Contemporary World"? So why read this book given the vast ocean of similar 'mild' works? Personally, I found this book of good value due to the many unfamiliar Arabic terms used to identify various Islamic concepts.

A very informative book on the struggles facing islamic communities today around the world. It is a definite read for middle east studies students or anyone interested in the region and it's dominant faith.

In spite of my following comments, I have huge respect for the author, especially for clarifying what traditional (i.e. the 'real') Islam is about, and for the positive influences that Sufism brings to Islam. However his writings are not for the average lay person, as he writes and lives at a highly intellectual and metaphysical level, and with much nostalgia and idealism. Compared to the life of most of us, I feel he 'floats' through life in a meditative trance- one that I wish all of us could experience more of, but few of us can practicality-wise achieve. He's spent his entire life living physically and mentally in an above average environment, whether living in the US or in Iran; as such he's never had to experience the dimly difficult lives that the average and lower class Middle Easterners (and us average foreigners) have to endure when living in the Middle East (ME). Although I don't have his intellect or education, I do feel qualified (much self education, travelling and living in the ME and marrying a Moslem) in sharing my gut reaction to this book. I'm very aware that the Islam that most Moslems (at least in the ME) practice is in fact largely based on tradition and misinformation, both of which too frequently run totally opposite what the true message of traditional Islam preaches. He makes it clear that the purpose of Islamic teachings is to provide the greatest stability to the greatest number of people, and not to make everyone happy. Well, I guess I don't fit into what the masses want and are willing to give up for this intended stability (and which is no longer materializing). Here are a few examples. Work ethics and architecture - Nasr

agrees that the work ethics of many Moslems has deteriorated since so many have moved to large modern cities. He feels it's because people have left behind those people (imams, master craftspeople, family etc.) who instilled a need for quality, beauty, serenity in their lives. My comment is, other countries have also gone through this massive change - be it America, Europe or Japan; yet these countries maintained a strong work ethic and a need for esthetics. What is it about Islam that a person can't maintain these qualities on their own? Why is a strong task master always needed? One of the reasons the ME can't move forward is that individual accountability is in short supply. What initially drew me to Islam is the incredible beauty of its traditional architecture. But today few people get to enjoy this beauty and if it is available it is rarely free to enjoy. One pays to even enter a run down garden or park. And it's certainly not reflected in the vast majority of homes, schools and offices they build, the clutter that they live and work in, the sewage and garbage on the street, the lack of public gardens (e.g. Cairo) or in most public places. Nasr blames modernity (often meaning western influences), yet Japan is still both modern and traditional. Relationship between men and women - The book is more than 450 pages long, yet he devotes only 11 pages to this subject. On the one hand he says that traditional Islam supports a woman being able to pursue whatever career and interests she wants, including running a country, but that she first needs approval (assuming from her male guardian) before doing this. How can a woman run a country or large organization or smaller, if she is restricted in her contact with men (which he acknowledges as acceptable for some Moslems), and when her legal opinion is only 1/3 of that of a man? If I understand this section correctly, what a woman is allowed to pursue in her life is still dependent on what her male guardian and her local society say is acceptable. How sad. Male dominance - Islam states this is a Divine right but has extra responsibilities that go with it. Unfortunately in my opinion and the opinion of every Egyptian woman I have met, the majority of men in Egypt fails to fulfill their responsibilities. Why? Sex - The author and ancient Islamic erotica fully support the pleasure of sex between a man and a woman. However in Shereen El Fiki's book "Sex and the Citadel" and in her Ted talks give a very gloomy picture of sex in the Middle East, and I support her views. Taboos, ignorance and dissatisfaction abound. He does however state that the "true power of sexual union (as part of union with the Divine) has ceased to operate for most human beings, except in a potential manner". Another example of his living in an idealized world, not the real world. Marriage - He says polygamy (which he says is not required or suitable for all) does not have to be legitimized in order to be sacralised. Hmm. So what happens to the unmarried woman/concubine when her man no longer wants her? The women in the ME seems to suffer the consequences of most everything more than the men. Women are beatitude - then why does the Koran/Hadiths say its Ok

for a man to slap us around? (The definition of slapping us around also varies).Homosexuality- Nasr acknowledges that this has occurred in all times and in all societies but it works against the ultimate perfection of the Divine. Then why are some people born homosexual? Did any of us heterosexual choose our sexuality? I know I didn't choose mine.When I read the Koran and Hadiths, not matter how hard I try not to, all I read is hell and punishment. If these are truly the words of God, then why does it take a PhD like the author to have to spend his entire life to give us the true interpretation of these books? Why did whatever force that created us, not use words that the average, not too bright and not well educated individual understand? Certainly the vast majority of the Imam's in mosques aren't preaching and regular teachers aren't teaching this stuff, as they themselves are not adequately educated and trained.And isn't this huge disparity in interpretations the reason we've been controlling and killing each other since all these major religions started? Why did God make all of this so difficult for us to understand what she intended?

Islam is Peace - Lots of knowledge, and wisdom, for any person, willing to listen, and learn, from this Great book.

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