

## Brazil's Author Paulo Coelho Talks About His Love for Islam

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Paulo Coelho, the Brazilian writer who took the world stage with his thundering book *The Alchemist*, the source of inspiration for many around the world, told Syria's leading English-speaking magazine, *Forward*, his writings were influenced by the Sufi traditions of Islam.

Coelho made his debut in a Syrian media outlet last March, emphasizing his great admiration of Sufi figures, such as the famed Sufi dervish and love poet, Jelaluddin Rumi.

"Indeed, Sufism has inspired me a lot throughout my life and I refer to this tradition in some of my books such as *The Alchemist* and more recently *The Zahir*. Rumi is of course the first figure that springs to mind. His teachings and visions are incredibly subtle and clear," Coelho told Sami Moubayed, the Syrian political analyst and editor-in-chief of *Forward Magazine*.

Sufism, being the mystical order of Islam, is a natural part of Syrian life, with dervishes and Sufi Sheikhs from around the world considering Damascus as their spiritual center and homeland.

Mostly populated by followers of the Naqshbandi order, Damascus is home to the tomb of Ibn Arabi, the widely studied Sufi leader and author of the *Meccan Revelations*, celebrated by Western scholars as one of the most enigmatic publications to date.

Sufism is a non-violent spiritual path towards understanding man's relationship with God and his/her fellow human beings, through the power of Love. Most of Syria's Muftis (Religious Leaders appointed by government) are Sufi.

Coelho also revealed that the Arab character (Sharine Khalil) in one of his recent novels is inspired by a real person, from whom he weaved the threads of a story he was longing to tell; referring to it as the "feminine side of God."

Coelho said he believed that the strength of influencing people comes from the freedom contained in each one of us - whether Muslim, Arab, Western or Latin.

When writing *The Alchemist*, Coelho was under the influence of Spirituality, which in his opinion came from curiosity. He believes that whether you like it or not life itself is a pilgrimage, a concept widely shared by Sufi thought and approach.

The interview with Coelho appears in Forward Magazine's issue of April 2009.