

## SUMMARY OF DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

### Self-knowledge and ethical perfection in the thought of Idries Shah

The doctoral dissertation deals with the topic of contemporary Sufism, of which Idries Shah was an outstanding representative.

The aim of the dissertation is to review the allegations against Idries Shah and to attempt to rehabilitate his teaching through the reconstruction and analysis of his philosophical thought. Additionally, it explores the relevance and applications of Shah's thought in the context of socio-cultural changes of the 21st century.

The general analytical, synthetic and comparative methods were used in the dissertation. The subject of the analysis are the texts of Idries Shah regarding Sufism, other representatives of this tradition, as well as commentators and continuators of his thought. To better understand some aspects of Sufism and enrich the analysis of Shah's works, a comparative approach was adopted, exposing the broader context of some aspects of the Sufi tradition. The use of the synthetic method allowed for the reconstruction of Shah's Sufi views on self-improvement, self-knowledge and ethics.

The first chapter is an introduction to Shah's Sufi thought, presenting him and the main accusations against him. Key elements of the criticisms made by Lawrence Paul Elwell-Sutton, James Moore and other scholars are presented. Since one of the accusations against Shah is to describe his activities as "pseudo-Sufism", the characteristics of neo-Sufism or Western Sufism are explained. The context of these considerations was an attempt to extract the essence of Sufism.

The next chapter explains the elements of the human development method that Shah used. The importance of a functional approach to practice and the issue of ritualism were emphasized. Particular emphasis was placed on the importance of stories and their educational nature. It is shown how they can contribute to learning how to read the recurring structures of existential phenomena that people encounter. There was also a polemic with Elwell-Sutton, arguing that Shah's thought should be classified as philosophy, not psychology. It was based on the Greek understanding of the psyche and the model of psychological and spiritual maturity in the context of freeing oneself from an egoistic approach to life and the world.

The next stage of the work was the analysis of the scope of self-knowledge in the face of ethical improvement. Attention was paid to issues of multiple nature, divided identity, identification, cognitive errors and ontological identity. The Sufi technical term *nafs* is explained and its impact on moral behavior is outlined. The relationship between functioning at a low level of *nafs* and cognitive errors and obstacles to self-knowledge is also presented.

The fourth chapter addresses the issue of the relationship between cognition and ethics. The issue of the insufficiency of compliance with social norms is explained and the subjective conditions that must be met in order to talk about improvement enabling the achievement of lasting disposition related to ethical action are indicated. The ethical categories distinguished by Shah are discussed, i.e. goodness, generosity and wisdom. The sources of ethical perfection and the final and complete state of realizing humanity are indicated. On the basis of Shah's reconstructed philosophical views, the main accusations against him are criticized and his thoughts are rehabilitated.

The work culminates in reflections on the relevance of Shah's thoughts in the context of various methods of personal and spiritual development, the search for the foundations of ethics and intercultural dialogue. Selected elements of the thought of the Polish philosopher Navis Nord, who was inspired by Shah's writings, are presented. The importance of non-linear thinking was explained and the development of the concept of *nafs* was indicated. Finally, an attempt was made to assess the universal anthropological and ethical threads in the Sufi proposal.

Kraków, 17.06.2024

