

# THE SHRINE OF A SILK ROAD SUFI SAINT

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In hidden dunes of the Takla

Makan Desert of Chinese Turkestan, you find pilgrimage sites such as this devoted to Sufi saints revered by the Uighur (wee-ger) people who live in oases on the great desert's edges. The trade route connecting the oases is the Southern Silk Road traversed by Marco Polo in 1273.

Sufism is the ancient peaceful interpretation of Islam. Just as Jesus advised the Pharisees to seek God in their hearts, not through the robotic repetition of religious laws and rules, so do the Sufis. Just as Jesus preached a philosophy of non-violence and benevolence, so do the Sufis. Sufism teaches that the path to Islamic enlightenment is not through compulsion of any kind, but through a personal ecstatic experience of the Divine.

Thus these ramshackle shrines in an uninhabited roadless wilderness – you get to them by donkey cart – are havens of serenity in a chaotic world. This is one of the remotest places on earth, but if you ever manage to get here, you will feel serenity in your heart. (*Glimpses of Our Breathtaking World #183* photo ©Jack Wheeler)

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