Indiana University
Department of Near Eastern
Languages and Cultures (NELC)
&
Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies Program

are pleased to present the

Fifth Annual Victor Danner Memorial
Lecture in Islamic Studies

7:30 p.m., April 13th, 2007
President’s Room, University Club
Indiana Memorial Union

“Uncovering the Secrets of
Consciousness:
The Sufi Approach”

Presented by

Professor William Chittick
Stony Brook University

Generously funded by the
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We would like to offer our sincere thanks to the generous people who have already contributed to the Victor Danner Memorial fund:

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Thank you!
Born and raised in Milford, Connecticut, William C. Chittick completed his B.A. in history at the College of Wooster (Ohio) and then went to Iran, where he completed a Ph.D. in Persian literature at Tehran University in 1974. He taught comparative religion in the humanities department at Aryamehr Technical University in Tehran and returned to the United States in January 1979. For three years he was assistant editor at the Encyclopaedia Iranica (Columbia University), and since 1983 he has taught religious studies at Stony Brook.

Chittick is author and translator of twenty-five books and one hundred articles on Islamic thought, Sufism, Shi'ism, and Persian literature. His more recent books include The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-`Arabi’s Cosmology (State University of New York Press, 1998), Sufism: A Short Introduction (One World, 2000), The Heart of Islamic Philosophy (Oxford University Press, 2001), The Elixir of the Gnostics (Brigham Young University Press, 2003), and Me & Rumi: The Autobiography of Shams-i Tabrizi (FonsVitae, 2004). He is currently working on several research projects in Sufism and Islamic philosophy.

Over the past few years, the discoveries and theories of neuroscience have occupied a prominent place in the popular media, and we frequently hear that mankind is finally coming to understand the nature of human consciousness. Various religious traditions, for their part, have always had a great deal to say about human subjectivity and its significance in the cosmic scheme of things. Within Islam, two broad fields of learning—Sufism and philosophy—have always placed consciousness near the center of their concerns. In both of these fields, however, consciousness is less a given than something to be achieved. A review of the basic Sufi understanding may throw some light on the strengths and weaknesses of contemporary approaches.
Professor Victor Danner was born on October 22, 1926, in Irapuato, Guanajuato, Mexico to Arthur James and Maria Lopez Danner. As a young man, he served his country during WWII. After the war he attended Georgetown University where he received his B.A. *magna cum laude* in 1957. Later that year he traveled to Morocco to become an instructor and eventually Director of the American Language Center, sponsored by the US Information Service. While there he took advantage of the opportunity not only to get acquainted with the country but also to perfect his knowledge of classical Arabic texts.

In 1964, Professor Danner returned to the US for his doctoral studies and graduated from Harvard in 1970. He came to IU in 1967 and was a professor of Arabic and Religious Studies at Indiana University until his death in 1990. He served as Chairman of the Near Eastern Languages and Cultures Department for five years, and was an enthusiastic supporter of the Middle Eastern Studies Program.

He was an internationally renowned scholar in the fields of Islamic mysticism, comparative religion, and classical Arabic literature. In 1976, he was invited to speak at the international World Festival of Islam in London. Professor Danner was also active in a number of professional organizations, including the Washington D.C.-based Foundation for Traditional Studies, for which he served as Secretary-Treasurer. He wrote *Ibn ‘Ata ‘Allah’s Sufi Aphorisms* (1973); *Ibn ‘Ata ‘Allah: The Book of Wisdom*, (1978); and *The Islamic Tradition: An Introduction* (1988), in addition to over twenty-five articles and reviews.

One of his students, Lauri King Irani, captured his essence: “As a teacher, Victor Danner had few equals. He taught Arabic, classical Arabic literature, Islam, Sufism, the Qur’an, comparative religion, comparative mysticism, and Eastern religions. His dignified bearing, elegant gestures, and verbal eloquence transformed his lectures into performances which had the power to captivate and inspire his students, whether he was discussing Arabic grammar or Islamic theology. His concern for and encouragement of his students, coupled with his understated sense of humor, earned him a well-deserved reputation as a caring and committed educator who taught not only when behind the classroom lectern, but also by example.”

*He who is illumined at the beginning is illumined at the end.*

—from the *Sufi Aphorisms* by Ibn ‘Ata ‘Allah (d.1309)
Translated by Victor Danner