

Islamic Mysticism

REL 277 (Spring 2014)

T & TH 9:40 – 10:55 (Chambers 2164)

Instructor: Syed Rizwan Zamir

Office: Preyer 201A (Ph: 704- 894 2950)

Email: rizamir@davidson.edu (on the weekends I will have limited access to email)

Office Hours: Mon & Wed 11:30- 12:30 & Thu 12:15-1:30

Schedule appointments via www.signupgenius.com

NOTE: If you are unable to meet during these times, schedule appointment through email.

Course Description:

This course surveys Islamic spirituality, the varieties of Islamic mystical traditions and conceptual framework that could navigate and make sense of this diversity. In summary, this course is a thematic and conceptual introduction to the “inner Islam” and its numerous manifestations (history of Islamic mysticism will be discussed only in relation to this conceptual study). We will begin with a discussion of the key terms and concepts, ‘inner’, ‘spiritual’, ‘religious’, ‘esoteric’ and ‘mystical’ (and how these will be employed throughout the course), review the history of the study of Islamic mysticism in the West and a very basic introduction to the Islamic tradition. Then through a conceptual framework of “action-love-knowledge” centered forms of spiritual orientations, we will survey the various forms of Islamic spirituality. These include general spiritual doctrines and practices shared by all Muslims, Sufism – the most popular and influential mystical tradition of Islam – and its diverse manifestations, Shi‘ite spirituality in its Twelver and Sevens varieties, Islamic mystical philosophy and philosophical mysticism. Our method of study will include primary sources, secondary scholarship, multimedia material, and perhaps field trips and interviews with the practitioners of Islamic spirituality. In the process, we will cover historical origins of the varieties of Islamic mysticism, their development, key figures, doctrines and spiritual practices and influence within Islamic societies and beyond. Depending upon the time in hand, we may also examine the doctrinal and historical overlaps among these spiritual traditions, and their attitude towards one another, from mutual respect and acceptance to polemical rejection. Finally, we will reflect on the cultural and intellectual significance of Islamic mysticism for Islamic civilization and challenges faced by Islamic mystical traditions in the contemporary world.

Objectives of the Course:

Since it is impossible for this course to be more than an *overview of Islamic spirituality*, it is expected that by the end of the class, the students will have the necessary language, categories and familiarity with the Islamic mystical traditions to pursue further study, engage the texts and practitioners of Islamic mystical traditions and make sense of Islamic mystical thought, practice and life. For the instructor, the success or failure of the course depends on how far the class as a group accomplishes these goals. Furthermore, implicit but the most significant goal of this class is to make learning *relevant, useful, enjoyable* and *meaningful* for all involved in the class. Making the class more relevant to you personally is something that will require your engagement and deep interest. Feel free to talk to the instructor about ways in which you may contribute in achieving these goals, personally and as a group.

Format of the Class:

(NOTE: You are expected to always bring with you the syllabus and readings for the week)

The format (i.e., structure of the class lecture/discussion, and presentations/assignments) and selection of readings are all carefully thought-out to meet the goals listed above. Students must note that the extent and length of lectures, in-class discussion, debates and group work will be decided in view of these goals and could alter as per the needs of the class. That is why the class format will be flexible and may vary from week to week.

Readings are absolutely critical to your success in this class, both for comprehending the subject and in earning a good grade. Generally speaking, even lectures will mostly be geared towards better understanding of the assigned material. Lectures will provide a framework for the readings, clarify them, and highlight the key points. Hence, you are absolutely expected to have read and formulated your thoughts on the readings before the beginning of the week.

Occasionally, you will be asked to present the summary of the readings, make critical comments, work in groups and make formal presentations of selective portion of the readings, bring in questions from the readings, examples from the media, journals, blogs, magazines or other forums and from outside of the assigned reading for further discussion

and clarification. All these activities and active participation in the in-class debates and discussion will be critical.

Your participation grade is based therefore on the overall quality of your in-class participation throughout the semester. This includes proper class etiquette, attentiveness, preparing for the discussion sessions, asking engaging questions and responding to those asked by the instructor. Do ask the instructor if you have any questions regarding how to make your participation more effective.

Course Requirements:

(NOTE: The instructor reserves the right to alter the syllabus as he deems fit)

First Review	25%
Final Review (Cumulative)	35%
Reflection Paper I (Movie, 750-900 words)–DUE May 1 st	15%
Reflection Paper II (500 words) –DUE April 3 rd	10%
Attendance & Participation (includes the debate, short assignments, presentations, field trip and group work)	15%

Attendance Policy:

Attendance is compulsory in this course (I will take regular attendance!) and more than **2 absences** without valid excuse such as sickness or family emergency etc. will result in the lowering of grade. It is student's responsibility to obtain notes and 'catch-up' in the case of absence. Absence will not be a good excuse for not knowing what happened in the class.

REFLECTION PAPERS (General Guidelines on Audience and Citation):

Note: The audience for all your written assignments is your REL 277 class. Only cite fully if it is a source other than the assigned material. You may use Chicago or MLA format.

1. Your reflection paper is to help enhance the level of class conversation and discussion. In writing it, imagine you are reading it aloud for everyone to hear and engage it.
2. The purpose of the response paper is to help you reflect and critically engage the materials you have learned in the class. Remember you are writing for your fellow

classmates who have also read the same material. Therefore, restating or summarizing the readings will be absolutely redundant.

3. Yes, you need to demonstrate that you have a good grasp of the material and have critically engaged the readings. Choose to reflect on the aspects of readings that you find fascinating, intriguing, contentious, or simply unclear/confusing.
4. ENGAGE READINGS: A good response paper will engage the readings and speak from both *within* and *without* these texts. Ask the instructor to explain this distinction.
5. The key questions you should be asking yourself are the following:
 - i. DO YOU CARE? Is this idea worth your time and effort? Do you care about the topic? Would you enjoy thinking about it?
 - ii. FEASIBILITY: Is the idea manageable within the word-limit prescribed for the assignment? With limited words, write only after having fully developed your thoughts so you could state those as clearly and succinctly as possible.
 - iii. ILLUMINE: Will it be found interesting and illuminating by the class as a whole? Why should your classmates care about what you have to say? Does the reflection offer something different/new or merely summarizes?
 - iv. SHOW: Does it *show* (not just state) what it was meant to convey to the class?
 - v. PERSUADE: Does it convince or persuade your classmates?
6. A response paper is not an op-ed or an expression of how you felt about the readings. A response paper, like all writing, is meant to persuade the reader of your analysis. You do not need to exclude yourself. Yes, you can use first person pronoun I! Do not pretend as if you have some objective view-from-the-top stance. You should come across fully aware of the various assumptions you bring to your analysis.
7. Unnecessary quotes from the readings are as unacceptable as a rambling current of thoughts unrelated to the subject at hand.
8. Do mention the WORD COUNT.

FIELD TRIP:

If a possibility arises we may through consensus undertake a field trip. In that case the trip will be binding and will count toward your participation grade.

Instructions for EXAMS:

1. GREEN BOOK: You will absolutely need Green Books for your exam. Loose paper (with or without clips/staple is irrelevant!) will result in loss of points.
2. HANDWRITING: Clear and legible. If I cannot read your handwriting, it will mean I won't understand what you are saying. I will have no option but to assume that you don't know the material.
3. READ AND ANSWER THE QUESTION CAREFULLY: It is here usually that well-prepared students lose points. Either they end up answering the wrong question (i.e., misreading the question) or not answering it FULLY. So answer the question asked, and answer all parts of it.
4. TIME MANAGEMENT: It is common sense and I have suggested a way to divide time for your answers. Do not write essays for short IDs. You will have to make choices. For IDs and short answers you will have to prioritize between more and less important, and more and less relevant things you choose to mention.
5. READ THE QUESTION AGAIN AND AGAIN WHILE ANSWERING IT: Related to 3, this works well for keeping one on track.

Writing and Speaking Centers:

Basic writing and speaking skills are expected in this course and quality of both will be critical to your success in this course. You are therefore strongly encouraged to consult writing and speaking centers for your assignments and class presentations. Look up the links below for more information on the services they provide:

Writing Center: <http://www3.davidson.edu/cms/x11014.xml>

Speaking Center: <http://www3.davidson.edu/cms/x15986.xml>

Disabilities: A student who requires accommodation for a documented disability of any type should see me *immediately* to discuss modifications to course requirements.

Academic Honesty: Students are expected to fully abide by the Honor Code as set out by the College and should pledge all their assignments and exams.

Required Readings (A copy each on Reserve in the Library & available at the Bookstore)

1. Chittick, William C. *Divine Love: Islamic Literature and the Path to God* (New York: Yale University Press, 2013)
2. Bayat, Mojdeh and Mohammad Ali, *Tales from the Land of the Sufis* (Boston: Shambhala, 1994)
3. Ernst, Carl W. *Teachings of Sufism* (Boston: Shambhala, 1999)
4. Schuon, Frithjof. *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (Wheaton: Quest Books, 2005)
5. Spevack, Aaron. *Ghazali on the Principles of Islamic Spirituality: Selections from Forty Foundations of Religion--Annotated and Explained* (Woodstock: Skylight Illuminations, 2012)
6. *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*, World Spirituality Series, Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Ed.) (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997)
7. ***Renard, John. *Windows on the House of Islam*. California University Press, 1998

Recommended Background Readings:

- Gibb, Hamilton. *Mohammedanism: A Historical Survey* (? : Kessinger Publishing, 2010)
- Schimmel, Annemarie. *Islam: An Introduction*. (New York: SUNY, 1992)
- Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *Islam: Religion, History and Civilization* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003)

COURSE OUTLINE

SECTION A: FOUNDATIONS

WEEK 1 (Jan 14-16): The Study of Islamic Mysticism – Overview, Typologies & Framework

Introduction to basic Islamic beliefs and practices: *Islam*, *Iman* and *Ihsan*

Situating Islamic Spirituality within the broader Islamic Tradition

Introduction to the categories “Exoteric” and “Esoteric”

What is “Islamic Mysticism”? Theoretical Considerations

A Typology of Islamic Mysticism & Varieties within Islamic Spirituality

- Ghazali on the Principles, 42-111
- Nasr, “The Interior Life in Islam” in *Islamic Life and Thought* (library e-book)
- Nasr, *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*, 111-130
- “Hadith of Gabriel” (will be provided)

WEEK 2 (Jan 21-23): Sources of Islamic Spirituality I: The Qur’an

Is the Qur’an a mystical/spiritual text? Mystical *engagements* with the scripture

Mystical *themes* within the Qur’an and mystical *interpretations* of the Qur’an

- Nasr, *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*, p. 3-47
- The Qur’an: Joseph, Khidr and Moses (to be provided)
- Ernst, *Teachings of Sufism*, p. 1-14

WEEK 3 (Jan 28-30): Sources of Islamic Spirituality II: The Prophet

The Prophet as Mystic: Mystical themes within the biography of the Prophet

Mi’raj and Muhammadan Light: Cosmic dimensions of the Prophetic Reality

Mystical Sayings of the Prophet

- Schimmel *And Muhammad is His Messenger*, pp. 105-143 (On reserve)
- Renard, *Windows on the House of Islam*, 102-103, 120-124 & 336-345 (library e-book)
- Ernst, *Teachings of Sufism*, p. 15-39

Documentary: *Tawhid: The One in the Many*

SECTION B: TYPOLOGY OF ISLAMIC MYSTICISM

WEEK 4 (Feb 4-6): Type I – The Path of Fear/Action (Ascetic Mysticism)

Ascetic Mystical Theology and Ritual Life

Varieties within the Path of Action

Language, Motifs and Themes within Ascetic-Mysticism

- *Ghazali on the Principles*, 115-209

WEEK 5 (Feb 11-13): The Path of Fear/Action (Ascetic Mysticism) continued...

Asceticism Embodied: Asceticism in Islamic Thought, Practice and History

- ‘Alī, *The Characteristics of the Pious* <http://www.al-islam.org/selfbuilding/12.htm>
- *Ghazali on the Principles*, 211-296

WEEK 6 (Feb 16-20): Type II – The Path of Love (Devotional Mysticism)

Language, Motifs and Themes within Love-Mysticism

Love vis-à-vis Action

Relationship between Human-Human and Human-Divine Love

- *Tales from the Land of the Sufis*, 71-80, 83-115, 133-136, 142-144 & 151-167
- Renard, *Windows on the House of Islam*, 297-298 (e-book)
- Rumi, *Masnawi* Part 1 (e-book), readings TBA

WEEK 7 (Feb 25-27): The Path of Love Continued...

Theology of Love

Varieties within Expressions of Love-Mysticism

Love of God, the Prophet, the Imams, Saints and Spiritual Teacher

- Ernst, *Teachings of Sufism*, p. 82-94
- Chittick, *Divine Love*, pp. 41-104 & 1-40

SPRING BREAK: Fri, Feb 28 (4:30 p.m.) - Mon, Mar 10 (8:30 a.m.)

WEEK 9 (March 11-13): Path of Knowledge I –Gnostic Mysticism (Sufism)

Knowledge vis-à-vis Action & Love

Theology of Gnostic Mysticism

Language, Motifs, Themes and Expressions of Gnostic-Mysticism

- Nasr, S. H., “With What Do Theoretical Sufism and Gnosis Deal?” (will be provided)
- Nasr, *Islamic Spirituality: Manifestations*, p.49-79
- Ibn ‘Arabi *The Ringstones of Wisdom* (tr. Dagli), 1-17 & 277-294 (On reserve)

MAR 11: FIRST REVIEW

WEEK 10 (Mar 18-20): Path of Knowledge II & III (Shi'ite Spirituality & Philosophy)

Varieties of Knowledge-Mysticism

Particularities of the Shi'ite Mystical Traditions- Seveners & Twelvers

Islamic Philosophy as Mysticism (A Different Conception of Philosophy)

- Nasr, *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*, p.160-178 & 186-198
- *Shi'ism: Doctrines, Thought, Spirituality*, p.167-187 (library e-book)
- Alfarabi, "Attainment of Happiness" (will be provided)

WEEK 11 (Mar 25-27): Doctrinal Teachings of Islamic Spirituality

Mystical Theology & Cosmology

Mystical Psychology and Anthropology

Convergences and Divergences among Gnostic mystical traditions

- Nasr, *Islamic Spirituality, Foundations*, p.311-377, 294-307

WEEK 12 (Apr 1-3): Path of Knowledge contd... & Concluding Section II

Concluding the Typological Survey of Islamic Mysticism

April 1st: In-class Debate

Apr 3rd: REFLECTION PAPER DUE

Which Islamic mystical tradition makes most sense/most appealing to you and why? Which one seems most absurd and why? Make sure that you demonstrate a thorough comprehension of the mystical traditions you discuss in your response paper. Reflect on your reactions vis-à-vis these traditions and underlying reasons for those. (500 words)

OR

A reflection paper of your choice (you need instructor's permission on the idea by Mar 27)

SECTION C: ELABORATIONS, IMMERSION & BEYOND

WEEK 13 (Apr 8-10): Devotion, Ritual and Prayer Life in Islamic Mysticism

Spiritual Practices, Ethics & Ritual Life: Shared and Divergent Expressions
Mystical Communities and the Shrine Culture

Documentaries:

1. *I am a Sufi, I am a Muslim* (library website)
 2. *Sufi Soul*
- Nasr, *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*, p.131-143 & 265-293
 - Nasr, *Islamic Spirituality: Manifestations*, Chapter 24 (on reserve)
 - Ernst, *Teachings of Sufism*, p. 40-81, 95-147

WEEK 14 (Apr 15-17): Expressions of Islamic Mysticism: Culture, Institutions, and History

Master-Disciple Relationship and Lives of the Saints
Key Figures, Major Sufi Orders, Their Teachings and legacy
Spiritual Chivalry, Art and architecture & Esoteric/Hidden sciences

***Group Powerpoint Teaching: Readings for this week (will be assigned)

- Ernst, *Teachings of Sufism*, pp. 148-199
- Nasr, *Islamic Spirituality: Manifestations*, Chapters 15, 23 & 25 (library reserve)
- Renard, *Windows on the House of Islam*, 286-322 (e-book)

EASTER BREAK (April 18 – April 23)

WEEK 15 (Apr 24): The Mystical Experience

The Experiential Dimension and Evaluating the Mystical Experience

- Renard, *Windows on the House of Islam*, 325-383 (e-book)
- Thursday April 24th: Bab 'Aziz**
(Mandatory FILM viewing followed by discussion)

WEEK 16 (Apr 29-May 1): Concluding Our Study

Islam Mysticism in the Modern World
Comparative Mysticism East and West
Islamic Mysticism and the Religious Other

- Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, pp. 7-60 & 79-105

Reflection Paper due on May 1

Relate the movie to the themes studied in the course.

Cumulative FINAL EXAM (If needed, Optional Class Days [May 1-7] may also be used)