

Sufism

REL 377 (Spring 2012)

MW&F 9:30 – 10:20 (Chambers 1003)

Dr. Syed Rizwan Zamir

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Office Hours: Mon, Tue & Wed 3:00 – 4:30

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Course Description:

This course is a thematic and historical introduction to Sufism, the mystical tradition of Islam. We begin with a basic introduction to Islamic tradition, various forms of Islamic spirituality, and historical overview of the study of Sufism in the West. Then through a study of primary sources, secondary scholarship and multimedia we will survey Sufi doctrines, practices, historical development, and the cultural significance of Sufism for Islamic civilization. We will also examine Sufism's place within the broader Islamic intellectual tradition, for example, its relationship with Islamic law and theology. The final section will cover topics such as Sufism vis-à-vis other mystical traditions, Sufism in the contemporary Islamic world and the West, Sufi responses to the intellectual and civilizational challenge of modernity, and significance of Sufism for current debates such as Islam's relationship with the West, extremism and ecological crisis.

Required Readings (available at the Bookstore):

1. Chittick, William C. *Sufi Path of Love*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983)
2. Ernst, Carl W. *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism*. (Boston, Mass.: Shambhala, 1997)
3. _____. *Teachings of Sufism*. (Boston: Shambhala, 2004)
4. Sells, Michael Anthony. *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur'an, Miraj, Poetic and Theological Writings*. (New York: Paulist Press, 1996).
5. 'Attar, Farid al-Din. *The Conference of the Birds*. Trans. Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis. (New York: Penguin Books, 1984).
6. Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *Sufi Essays*. (Chicago: ABC International Group, 1999).

Course Requirements:

Midterm	30%
Paper (8-10 pages)	30% (Includes 5% for Presentation)
2 Responses (3-4 pages) OR Book Report (8pages)	20%
Class Participation*	20%

***Note:** Although there will be occasional lecturing, this is not a lecture class; it will be run primarily as a readings-based seminar. Together every week we will read, discuss and analyze the readings. You are expected to have carefully read the assigned readings prior to the class and your ability to raise critical points and ask pertinent questions for clarification and further discussion will be crucial to your success in this course. Occasionally, you may be asked to present (i.e., introduce, summarize and critically evaluate) the readings. Your participation grade is based, therefore, on the overall quality of your in-class participation during 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.

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

A Note on the Response Papers:

The purpose of the response paper is to help you critically engage the materials you have learned in the class. It is not merely a summary of the readings or lectures. Instead, these assignments give you a chance to reflect on aspects of the readings that you find interesting, contentious, or simply unclear/confusing. In the bigger picture, these “response papers” are designed to help you “think through” the major themes in the readings and develop synthesis of the disparate ideas that you’d learn. Clearly, a response paper is not an op-ed or an expression of how you felt about the readings. Without at

all leaving yourself out – and in full awareness of the assumptions you bring to your analysis – try to persuade your reader of your analysis. The key questions you should be asking yourself are the following:

1. Is this topic worth your time, effort and interest?
2. Is the topic manageable within the page-space prescribed for the assignment?
3. Is it worthy of reader's time and interest?
4. Does it show what it was meant to show to the reader?
5. Is your paper convincing/persuasive?

The response papers should indicate that you have critically engaged the readings; large quotes from the readings are as unacceptable as a rambling current of thoughts unrelated to the subject at hand.

Book Reports:

The purpose of the research paper is to help you to explore further a topic of your interest beyond what we were able to cover in the class. It is strongly recommended that by the end of the first month of classes you decide on the book you choose to write your report on. Make sure to consult with instructor regarding appropriateness of the book. Before you begin to write your book reports, you are required to read at least three academic book reviews. The book report should carefully summarize the purpose, structure, content, major arguments of the book and then analyze the book and its significance in light of all that you have learned during the semester. Make sure to engage the readings in your analysis.

Research Papers:

The purpose of the research paper is to allow you to explore further a topic of your interest beyond what we were able to cover in the class. The research paper should meet the standard academic criteria of a proper academic paper including citations.

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.

COURSE OUTLINE

WEEK 1 (Jan 18 –Jan 20): Introduction to the Course/Introduction to Islam/ Overview of Islamic Spirituality

Readings: Ernst, *Shambhala Guide to Sufism*, “Preface” (both); Nasr, “Preface” and “Introduction” from *Sufi Essays*, pp. 5-22; Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, "Preface" and "Introduction"

Note: Start reading an introductory book on Islam (especially those with no background in Islam)

- Introduction, syllabus review
- Introduction to Islam (Hadith Gabriel & The Three Dimensions)
- Varieties within Islamic Spirituality
- Western Study of Sufism
- Resources for the study of Sufism

WEEK 2 (Jan 23 –Jan 27): Sufism, Islam and Mysticism

Readings: Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, chapter 1, pp. 25-51; Chittick, "Sufism and Islam" (will be provided); Ernst, *Shambhala Guide to Sufism*, Chapter 1;

Jan 25: Documentary *Islam: Empire of Faith* (Part I)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4SkUBbFOFbg&feature=fvst>

- What is Mysticism?
- What is Sufism? Sufism vis-à-vis Mysticism
- Sufism vis-à-vis Islam
 - Inextricability of Islam and Sufism
 - Situating Sufism within the Islamic Tradition

WEEK 3 (Jan 30 – Feb 3): Sources of Sufism

Readings: Ernst, *Shambhala Guide to Sufism*, Chapter 2; Ernst, *Teachings of Sufism*, Chapter 1 & 2; Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 29-56, 75-96;

- Origins of Sufism
- Sources of Sufism
- Qur'an, Hadith, Mi'raj
- Sufi Qur'an commentary

Note: You should complete your reading of the introductory book on Islam by Jan 30

WEEK 4 (Feb 6 –Feb 10): Aims and Scope of Sufism

Readings: Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, chapter 2; Guenon, “Islamic Esoterism” (will be provided); Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love*, pp. 19-26 & 173-193

Feb 6: Documentary *Sufi Soul*

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ha0T5Vro6_w&feature=related

- Exoterism/Esoterism
- Form/Meaning
- Various Expressions of the Sufi goal of life
- Integration of Life

WEEK 5 (Feb 13 – Feb 17): Sufi Doctrines I – Sufi Metaphysics and Cosmology

Readings: William Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 15-29 (Will be provided); Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love*, 42-60; Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 251-280

- Sufi conceptions of the Divine
- Unity of Being
- *Fana'* and *Baqa'*
- Meaning of Monotheism

WEEK 6 (Feb 20 – Feb 24): Sufi Doctrines II: Sufi Anthropology

Readings: Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love*, 27-41, 61-107; Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 281-301

- Who is a Human Person?
- Situating Humans among the Creation
- Aim of Human Life
- The Covenant and the Trust
- Human Spirit and Intellect

WEEK 7 (Feb 27 – Mar 2): Sufi Doctrines III: The Perfect Human

Readings: Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, pp. 31-64 (Will be provided); Ernst, *Shambhala Guide to Sufism*, Chapter 3; Ernst, *Teachings of Sufism*, 159-179

- The Universal Human
- Prophecy and sanctity
- Saints and their Lives

March 2nd: 1st Response paper is due today

SPRING BREAK

FRIDAY, March 2 (4:30 P.M.) – MONDAY, March 12 (8:30 A.M.)

WEEK 8 (Mar 12 – Mar 16): Sufi Doctrines IV: The Spiritual Master

Readings: Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, Chapter 4; Ernst, *Shambhala Guide to Sufism*, Chapter 5; Ernst, *Teachings of Sufism*, 148-158; Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love*, 119-147

- Need for a Guide
- Role of the Shaykh
- Sufi Orders & Rules of the Brotherhood
- Discipleship

March 12: Midterm Exam

WEEK 9 (Mar 19 – Mar 23): Sufi Doctrines V: Sufi Psychology & Virtues

Readings: Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, chapter 5; Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 196-211 & 171-195; Schuon, “Virtues on the Way” (will be provided); *Teachings of Sufism*, 118-147

- The Sufi science of the soul
- Spiritual states and stations
- Spiritual Virtues

WEEK 10 (Mar 26 – Mar 30): Sufi Practices

Readings: Ernst, *Shambhala Guide to Sufism*, Chapter 4 & 7; Ernst, *Teachings of Sufism*, 40-81 & 95-117; Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love*, 148-170

Documentary: *Rumi: Wings of Love* OR Documentary: *Mystic Iran*

- Sufi Spiritual Practice
- Sufi Contemplative Life
- Conditions for the Contemplative Life
- *Dhikr* and the Divine Names
- Communal practices, forms of music and dance

WEEK 11 (Apr 2 – Apr 6): Love and the Feminine

Readings: Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love*, 194-247; Ernst, *Teachings of Sufism*, 82-95; Ernst, *Teachings of Sufism* 179-200;

- The Theme of Love in Sufi Literature
- Metaphors
- The Divine Feminine
- Women in Sufism

EASTER BREAK

FRIDAY, APRIL 6 (4:30 P.M.) – WEDNESDAY, APRIL 11 (8:30 A.M.)

WEEK 12 (Apr 11 – Apr 13): A Sufi Classic

Readings: Attar, *Conference of the Birds* (complete)

Film: *Bab 'Aziz* (We will watch it this weekend)

WEEK 13 (Apr 16 – Apr 20): Sufism: Presence in and Relevance for the Contemporary World

Readings: Ernst, *Shambhala Guide to Sufism*, chapter 8; Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, chapter 6, 9 and 10; Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love*, 334-350

- Sufism in the Shi'ite World
- Sufism in the West

- Diversity of manifestations of Sufism
- Sufism, politics, and *jihad*

WEEK 14 (Apr 23 – Apr 27): Discussion and Sharing of Response Papers and Book Reports

Apr 23: 2nd Response paper is due: *Reflection paper on the film and Attar's book and relating your analysis back to the readings of this course*

Apr 23: Book Report is due today

WEEK 15 (Apr 30 – May 2): Class Presentations

Term Project Presentations and Discussion

May 2: Term Project is due today