

Islamic Mysticism

REL 377 (Spring 2011)
T & TH 1:40 – 2:55 (Chambers 2234)

Prof. Syed Rizwan Zamir

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Office Hours: Mon & Wed 12:30- 2:00; Tue 3:00 – 4:30

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 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. *Faith and Practice of Islam: Three Thirteenth Century Sufi Texts*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).
2. Ernst, Carl W. *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism*. (Boston, Mass.: Shambhala, 1997).
3. Lings, Martin. *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century: Shaikh Ahmad Al-Alawi, His Spiritual Heritage and Legacy*. (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 1981).
4. Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *Sufi Essays*. (Chicago: ABC International Group, 1999).
5. 'Attar, Farid al-Din. *The Conference of the Birds*. Trans. Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis. Penguin Books, 1984.
6. Sells, Michael Anthony. *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur'an, Miraj, Poetic and Theological Writings*. (New York: Paulist Press, 1996).

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 and will be run primarily as a discussion seminar. It means that throughout the semester we will be closely reviewing and discussing the readings together in the class. You will be required to bring in questions from the readings for discussion and clarification and expected to have carefully read and taken notes from the readings. In other words, come prepared for the class discussion. You could occasionally 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 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.

Attendance Policy: Attendance is compulsory in this course and more than 1 absence 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:

Instead of merely a summary of the reading itself, these assignments give you a chance to reflect on aspects of the reading that you find interesting, contentious, or simply unclear/confusing. In the larger picture, these "response papers" are designed to help you "think through" the major themes in the readings and provide some insight to allow you to better participate in the class discussions. 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.

Grading Scale: To avoid any misunderstandings, I will share with you what is expected in order to obtain good marks in this course:

A: Excellent Work: a firm grasp of the material in lectures and readings and an ability to offer sound and insightful analysis.

B: Solid Work: a good grasp of the material in lectures and readings and significant effort to interpret the material in an analytical fashion.

C: Decent work: a fair grasp of the material in lectures and readings, but analysis and effort are lacking.

D: Poor work: a simplistic understanding of the material with little or no effort towards analysis.

F: Little grasp of the subject matter and no attempt to engage the material or respect the parameters of the course and assignments.

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.

NOTE: The instructor reserves the right to change/alter the syllabus as he deems fit.

COURSE OUTLINE

WEEK 1 (Aug 23-25): Introduction to the Course

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

Introduction, syllabus review
Resources for the study of Sufism

- Ernst, *Shambhala Guide to Sufism*, "Preface" and chapter 1
- Nasr, "Preface" and "Introduction" from *Sufi Essays*, pp. 5-22

WEEK 2 (Aug 30-Sep 1): Introduction to Islam/Overview of Islamic Spirituality

- *Note:* You should complete your reading of the Introductory book on Islam by this weekend

Introduction to Islam
Hadith Gabriel
The Three Dimensions
Varieties within Islamic Spirituality

- Chittick, *Faith and Practice*, "Introduction", pp. 1-23 and "Sufism and Islam", pp. 165-179
- Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, "Preface" and "Introduction"

WEEK 3 (Sep 6-8):

What is mysticism?
What is Sufism?
Inextricability of Islam and Sufism
Situating Sufism within the Islamic Tradition

- Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, chapter 1 and 2, pp. 25-51
- Chittick, "Sufism and Islam" in *Sufism: Love and Wisdom* (Will be provided)
- Nasr, "The Interior Life in Islam" in *Islamic Life and Thought* (Will be provided)

WEEK 4 (Sep 13-15): Sources of Sufism Contd.

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

- Ernst, *Shambhala Guide to Sufism*, chapter 2
- Lings, *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century*, pp. 34-47

- Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 25-56, 75-96

WEEK 5 (Sep 20-22): Sufi Elaborations of Islamic Faith and Practice

God, Prophecy and the Afterlife
Ritual Purification and Prayer

- Chittick, *Faith and Practice*, pp. 35-164

WEEK 6 (Sep 27-29): Sufi Doctrines I

Sufi conceptions of the Divine (continued)
The cosmos as Divine self-disclosure

- William Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, pp. 15-29 (Will be provided)
- Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love*, pp. 19-26, 42-60 (Will be provided)
- Martin Lings, *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century*, pp. 121-147

WEEK 7 (Oct 4-6): Sufi Doctrines II

Sufi Anthropology
The Universal Human
Prophecy and sanctity

- Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, pp. 31-64 (Will be provided)
- Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love*, pp. 61-107, 119-137 (Will be provided)
- Martin Lings, *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century*, pp. 199-203

Oct 4: 1st Response paper is due today

Oct 6: Midterm Exam

FALL BREAK: Fri, Oct 7 (4:30 p.m.) - Wed, Oct 12 (8:30 a.m.)

WEEK 8 (Thurs, Oct 13): Sufi Practices I

The Sufi science of the soul
Spiritual states and stations
Sufi practices, invocation, meditation, contemplation
Communal practices, forms of music and dance

- Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, chapter 5

- Ernst, *Shambhala Guide to Sufism*, chapter 4 and 7
- Sells, chapter 5 "Muhasibi"

WEEK 9 (Oct 18-20): Sufi Practices II

The Spiritual Master, His Function

- Martin Lings, *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century*, pp. 13-33, 48-117
- Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, chapter 4
- Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love*, pp. 137-147 (Will be provided)

WEEK 10 (Oct 25-27): Sufi Literature

Sufi poetry and literature
Sufism and the arts

- Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, chapter 12
- Ernst, *Shambhala Guide to Sufism*, chapter 6
- Martin Lings, *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century*, pp. 204-228 (selections)
- Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 56-74 and pp. 281-303

WEEK 11 (Nov 1-3): A Sufi Classic

- Attar, *Conference of the Birds* (complete)
- Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality* [Essay on the Conference of the Birds, will be provided]

WEEK 12 (Nov 8 - 10): Sufism in History

Early Sufism
Classical period of Sufism
Rise of the Sufi orders
The tradition of theoretical Sufism

- Ernst, *Shambhala Guide to Sufism*, chapter 5
- Sells, "Rabi'a," "Junayd," and "Hallaj," from *Early Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 151-170, 251-265, 266-280.
- Dakake, "Women and the Feminine in the Islamic Mystical Tradition" in *Sufism: Love and Wisdom* (will be provided)
- Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, chapter 7

WEEK 13 (Nov 15-17): Concluding Remarks - Sufism: Presence in and Relevance for the Contemporary World

Sufism in the Shi'ite World

Sufism in the West

Diversity of manifestations of Sufism

Sufism, politics, and *jihad*

- Ernst, *Shambhala Guide to Sufism*, chapter 8
- Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, chapter 6, 9 and 10
- Reza Shah-Kazemi, "From the Spirituality of *Jihad* to the Ideology of Jihadism" in *Islam, Fundamentalism, and the Betrayal of Tradition*, pp. 119-148 (Will be provided)
- Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "The Spiritual Needs of Western Man the Message of Sufism" from *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man* (Will be provided)
- Nasr, "Contemplation and Nature in the Perspective of Sufism" in *Islamic Life and Thought* (Will be provided)

Nov 15: 2nd Response paper/Book Report is due today

WEEK 14 (Nov 22): *There will be no class today* – You will watch a movie on the weekend

THANKSGIVING BREAK: Tue, Nov 22 (4:30 p.m.)-Mon, Nov. 28 (8:30 a.m.)

WEEK 15 (Nov 29-Dec 1): Class Presentations

*PAPER PRESENTATIONS
(PAPERS ARE DUE ON DEC 1)*

Wednesday, December 7 Fall Classes End

December 5-7 Optional Class Days

December 8 Reading Day