

Sunni and Shi'ite Islam

REL 276 (Spring 2012)
TTH 1:40 – 2:55 (Chambers 2084)

Dr. Syed Rizwan Zamir
Office: Preyer 201A
Off. Tel. (704) 894-2950
Email (Mon – Fri): rizamir@davidson.edu (On the weekends I will have limited access to email)
Office Hours: Mon, Tue & Wed 3:00 – 4:30

Course Description:

This course is an overview of the doctrines, thought, spirituality and history of Shi'ite Islam and complements RELI 272 (Introduction to Islam) that presented Islam from the mainstream Sunni point of view. Although primarily an introduction to Shi'ite Islam, throughout the semester we will touch upon the commonalities and differences between Sunni and Shi'ite Islam. Beginning with the origins of the Sunni-Shi'ite split in history our study will discuss Shi'ite theology, view of history and political and religious history, legal tradition, popular piety and spirituality. We will also examine major themes within the Sunni-Shi'ite polemical literature, and close with reflections on recent political developments and ecumenical efforts from both sides.

Required Readings (available at the Bookstore):

1. Amir-Moezzi, Mohammad Ali, and Institute of Ismaili Studies. *The Spirituality of Shi'i Islam: Beliefs and Practices*. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011).
2. Ayoub, Mahmoud. *The Crisis of Muslim History: Religion and Politics in Early Islam*. (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003).
3. al-Tabatabai, Muhammad Husayn. *Shi'ite Islam*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975).
4. Takim, Liyakat. *Shi'ism in America*. (New York: NYU Press, 2011)
5. Momen, Moojan. *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism*. (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1987).
6. Clarke, Lynda. *Shi'ite Heritage: Essays on Classical and Modern Traditions* (New York: Global Academic Publishing, 2001).

Course Requirements:

Midterm Examination	30%
Final Examination	35% (self-scheduled)
2 Response Papers (3-4 pages) OR Book Report (7-8 pages) OR Research Paper (8-10 pages)	20%
Attendance & Participation*	15%

Note:* Biweekly, we will be reviewing the readings together in the class. You will be required to bring in questions from the readings for discussion and clarification. Active participation in the **in-class debates will be crucial to your grade. The 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 and debates, 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.

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 larger 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 the 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.

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

COURSE OUTLINE

Week 1 (Jan 17 – Jan 19): Introduction to the Course/Islam

Readings: Tabatabai 3-35, Momen xiii- xviii, 1-10

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

- Preliminary Remarks on the Nature of the Sunni-Shi'ite Divide
- Framework for the study of Sunni and Shi'ite Islam
- Demographic Distribution of Sunnis and Shiites
- Scholarly Study of Shi'ism: History, Methods and Approaches
- Major sources and Scholars of Shi'ism
- Introduction to Islam

Week 2 (Jan 24 – Jan 26): Introduction to Islam and Early Islamic History

Readings: Ayoub: Introduction - p.80

Jan 24: Documentary *Islam: Empire of Faith*

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

- Origins of Islam
- The Prophet's Life (Meccan and Medinan Period)
- The Muslim Community during the Prophet's times
- The Prophet's Companions (*sababa*) and the Family (*ahl al-bayt*)

Week 3 (Jan 31 – Feb 2): Early Islamic History II: The Rightly Guided Caliphs

Readings: Ayoub: 81- 144;

- The Crisis
- The Saqifah Debate
- Arguments made by the Contenders of the Succession
- Key Features of the Caliphate of the 'Umar
- The Second Crisis
- The Caliphate of Uthman & 'Ali

Week 4 (Feb 7 – Feb 9): The Early Shi'ites

Readings: Clarke, 9-18 & 44-54; re-read Ayoub, 51-52

Feb 7: *No class today* [you will watch a documentary later instead (See Week 14)]

- The Term “Shi'a”
- Origins of the Shi'ites in Islamic History
- The Early Shi'ites
- Some Common Misperceptions about Shi'ism

Week 5 (Feb 14 – Feb 16): The Question of Succession: Sunni-Shi'ite Interpretations of the Early Islamic History

Readings: Ayoub, 145-155; Clarke, 19-43; Momen 11-22; Tabatabai 39-55

- Political and Spiritual Authority in Islam
- The Question of Succession to the Prophet
- Caliphate vs. Imamate
- Sunni and Shi'ite view of Islamic History
- Majority-Minority: Causes of Separation
- Sunni Perception of Political Authority: The Caliphate

FEB 16 (FIRST IN-CLASS DEBATE): *Sunni-Shi'ite Interpretations Of Early Islamic History*

Feb 16 (First Response Paper is due): *Compare, Contrast and Critically Analyze the Interpretations of the Early Islamic History by the Various Authors*

Week 6 (Feb 21 – Feb 23): Shi'ite Beliefs

Readings: Tabatabai, 123-176 & 184-190; Clarke, 127-136; Momen, Chapter 7;

- Sources of Shi'ite Theology and Practice
- Understanding of God
- Prophetology
- Eschatology
- Imamology

Week 7 (Feb 28 – Mar 1): Imamology Continued & the Lives of the Twelver Shi'ite Imams

Readings: Tabatabai, 177-184; Momen, Chapter 8; Tabatabai 190-214;

- *Walaya*
- Shi'ite Approach to the Concept of Authority: The Imam and His Functions
- Virtues and Excellences of the Household of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt*)
- Special Significance of 'Ali
- Miracles and Special Powers of the Imams
- Occultation and Return of the Twelfth Imam
- Lives of the Twelve Imams

SPRING BREAK

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

Week 8 (Mar 13 – Mar 15): Shi'ite Religious and Spiritual Life

Readings: Momen, Chapter 9 & 233-238; Tabatabai, 231-233 & 223-230; Amir-Moezzi, 431-460

- Shi'ite Law and Jurisprudence
- Prayer Life
- Encounters with the Imam
- Visitations

March 15: The Midterm Exam

Week 9 (Mar 20 – Mar 22): The Battle of Karbala: Commemorations & Aftermath

Readings: Momen, 238-244; Clarke, 55-61 & 375-388; Takim, 64-77

Mar 22: Documentary: *The Ten Days*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRLoauUNit4>

- The Battle of Karbala
- Martyrdom in Shi'ism
- Shi'ite Commemorations of Karbala
- Impact of the incident of Karbala and Shi'ite Sectarian Identity

Week 10 (Mar 27 – Mar 29): Toward Esoteric Shi'ism

Readings: Amir-Moezzi, 231-275, 133-168, 403-429

- Exoteric/Esoteric religion (*Nubunna/Walaya*)
- Shi'ite Esoteric Sacred History
- Esoteric Eschatology
- Imam as the Divine Guide
- Shi'ism as the Initiatic Path

Week 11 (Apr 3 – Apr 5): Esoteric Imamology and Esoteric Spiritual Practice

Readings: Amir-Moezzi 103-131, 277-304, 375-400

- Divinity of the Imam?
- Shi'ite Mystical anthropology
- Esoteric Spiritual Practice and Prayers

EASTER BREAK

Friday, April 6 (4:30 p.m.) – Wednesday, April 11 (8:30 a.m.)

Week 12 (Apr 12): Diversity within Shi'ism and Development of the Shi'ite Clerical Authority

Readings: Tabatabai, Chapter 2; Momen, 54-56, 65-68 & Chapter 10; Clarke, 137-179

- Zaydism, Isma'ilis and *Ghulat* Sects
- Development of Shiite Jurisprudence and Legal Methodology (*usul al-fiqh*)
- The Rise of the Notion of *ijtihad* & the School of Hilla
- The Emergence of Juristic Hierarchy (*marja'iyah*) and the Office of *Mujtahid* as the Supreme Jurisprudent (*'alamiyya*)
- Prerogatives of the Imam

Week 13 (Apr 17 – Apr 19): Shi'ite Thought & Intellectual History

Readings: Tabatabai pp. 63-67, 89-120; Momen, Chapter 11 & 12

- Shi'ite Intellectual History (An Outline)
- Shi'ite Theology

- Philosophical Developments within the Shi'ite World
- Mysticism within the Shi'ite Tradition
- Usuli-Akhbari Divide

APRIL 19 (Second Debate): *Usuli-Akhbari Divide in the Twelver Shi'ism*

Week 14 (Apr 24 – Apr 26): Contemporary Shi'ism and Sunni-Shi'ite Polemics

Readings: Takim, Chapter 3 & 4; Clarke, 389-406;

Also watch (over the weekend): *Once Upon A Time in Iran* (Documentary)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mo8mNqliJYg>

- Major themes in Sunni-Shi'ite Polemics
- Modern Iran
- Iranian Revolution
- Shi'ism in America

APRIL 26 (Third Debate): *Polemics between Sunnis and Shi'ites*

Week 15 (May 1): Contemporary Ecumenical Efforts & the Role of Sufism

Readings: Clarke, 301-315; Ayuob, "Conclusion"; Nasr, "Shi'ism and Sufism" (will be provided); Schuon, "Seeds of a Divergence" (will be provided)

- Reconciliatory efforts in the modern age
- Sufism, the meeting ground?

MAY 1: Second Response Paper/Book Report/Research Paper Due

Second Response Paper:

From the Topics Discussed during the Week 14, Pick One Polemical Theme and Review the Polemical Discussion between Sunnis and Shi'ites on the Blogs, Discussion-groups, Youtube and Other Websites.

OR

Compare, Contrast and Critically Analyze the Points of view of the Various Authors for the Week 15.