

Islamic Mysticism

REL 277 (Fall 2012)
T & TH 1:40 – 2:55 (Chambers 2234)

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Office Hours: Mon, Tue & Wed 3:15 – 4:30

Course Description:

The objective of the course is to introduce you to 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, conceptual and historical introduction to the “inner Islam” and its numerous manifestations. 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.¹ 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 generic spiritual doctrines and practices shared by all Muslims, Sufism – the most popular and influential mystical tradition – and its diverse manifestations, Shi’ite spirituality in its Twelver and Sevener varieties, Islamic mystical philosophy and philosophical mysticism. Our method of study will include primary sources, secondary scholarship, multimedia material, field trips and interviews with the practitioners of Islamic spirituality. In our study 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 by Islamic mystical traditions in the contemporary world.

¹ Although prior knowledge of Islam is not expected, those who have not taken a course with me are ***strongly recommended*** to read at least one of the introductory books on Islam listed in the recommended readings section.

Required Readings (available at the Bookstore):

1. Bayat, Mojdeh and Mohammad Ali, *Tales from the Land of the Sufis* (Boston: Shambhala, 1994)
2. Rumi, Jalal al-Din, Ehsan Yarshater (Ed.) and Hasan Javadi (Ed.), A. J. Arberry (Trans.), *Mystical Poems of Rumi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009)
3. Kugle, Scott and Carl Ernst. *Sufi Meditation and Contemplation: Timeless Wisdom from Mughal India*. (? : Omega Publications: 2012)
4. Spevack, Aaron. *Ghazali on the Principles of Islamic Spirituality: Selections from Forty Foundations of Religion--Annotated and Explained* (Woodstock: Skylight Illuminations, 2012)
5. *Islamic Spirituality (2 vols)*, World Spirituality Series, Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Ed.) (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997)
6. Green, Nile. *Sufism: A Global History*. New York: Blackwell, 2012)
7. Renard, John. *Windows on the House of Islam: Muslim Sources on Spirituality and Religious Life*. (? : University of California 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 Requirements:

(Please note that the instructor reserves the right to change/alter the syllabus as he deems fit)

Midterm Examination	25%
Final Exam	30%
Response Paper (500-words each) – Apr 9	15%
Reflection Paper on Movie (1000 words) – Apr 30	15%
Attendance, Presentations & Participation (includes the field trip)	15%

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:

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.

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.

FIELD TRIP:

During the class there will be a field trip (dates will be announced and all will be expected to attend). As an integral part of learning this field trip is mandatory, and will count towards participation grade.

Instructions for the Exam:

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.

ASSIGNMENTS:

Note: *The audience for all your written assignments is your REL 378 class.* Standard fonts and margins, and proper format of citations and bibliography are expected at all times. You may use Chicago or MLA format.

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.

COURSE OUTLINE

WEEK 1 (Jan 15-17): The Study of Islamic Mysticism – Theoretical Considerations

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

Introduction, syllabus review
Introduction to basic Islamic beliefs and practices
What is “Mysticism”?
Resources for and hurdles in the study of Islamic Mysticism

- *Ghazali on the Principles*, 3-41

WEEK 2 (Jan 22-24): What is Islamic Spirituality? Overview, Typologies & Framework

Jan 24: *Tawhid: The One in the Many* (Documentary): We will begin it in the class and you will finish it on your own.

What is “Islamic” in Islamic mysticism?
Vocabulary and Key Terms in discussing Islamic Mysticism
Situating Islamic Spirituality within the broader Islamic Tradition
Varieties within Islamic Spirituality
A Typology of Islamic Mysticism
Continuum between Exoteric and Esoteric Islam

- Nasr, “The Interior Life in Islam” in *Islamic Life and Thought* (Will be provided)
- Nasr, *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*, 111-130
- *Ghazali on the Principles*, 42-111

WEEK 3 (Jan 29-31): Sources of Islamic Spirituality I: The Qur’an

The Qur’an as a spiritual text
Mystical engagements with the Qur’an
Mystical themes within the Qur’an

- Nasr, *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*, p. 3-47
- Renard, *Windows on the House of Islam*, p. 2-24

WEEK 4 (Feb 5-7): Sources of Islamic Spirituality II: The Prophet

The Prophet as Mystic
Mystical themes within the biography of the Prophet
Muhammadan Light: Cosmic dimensions of the Prophetic Reality

- Renard, *Windows on the House of Islam*, 24-25, 102, 120-124, 336-344, 353-354
- Nasr, *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*, p.78-80 (*Mi'raj*), 89-90 (Farewell address), p.48-63

WEEK 5 (Feb 12-14): Type I – The Path of Fear/Action (Ascetic Mysticism)

Characteristics of the Path of Action
 Ascetic Mystical Theology and Ritual Life
 Varieties within the Path of Action
 Language, Motifs and Themes within Ascetic-Mysticism
 Muslim Ascetics throughout History

- *Ghazali on the Principles*, 115-209

WEEK 6 (Feb 19-21): The Path of Fear/Action (Ascetic Mysticism) continued...

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

WEEK 7 (Feb 26-28): Type II – The Path of Love (Devotional Mysticism)

Love vis-à-vis Action
 Theology of Love
 Language, Motifs and Themes within Love-Mysticism
 Relationship between Human-Human and Human-Divine Love

- *Tales from the Land of the Sufis*, 71-167

Group Presentations on the Readings

Feb 28: Midterm Exam

SPRING BREAK: Fri, Mar 1 (4:30 p.m.) - Mon, Mar 11 (8:30 a.m.)

WEEK 9 (March 12-14): The Path of Love Continued...

Varieties within Expressions of Love-Mysticism
 Rumi and the Mevlvis
 Love of God, the Prophet, the Imams, Saints and Spiritual Teacher

- Nasr, *Islamic Spirituality: Manifestations*, p.105-126
- *Mystical Poems of Rumi* (selections will be announced for group presentations)
- Renard, *Windows on the House of Islam*, 92-106 (library e-book)

WEEK 10 (Mar 19-21): Type III Gnostic Mysticism I (Shi'ite Spirituality & Philosophy)

Shi'ite Doctrines

Twelver vs. Sevener

Particularities of the Shi'ite Mystical Traditions

Islamic Philosophy as Mysticism (A Different Conception of Philosophy)

Convergences and Divergences among Gnostic mystical traditions

- Nasr, *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*, p.160-198
- H. Corbin, "Imamate" from *Shi'ism* (will be provided)
- Alfarabi on Happiness (will be provided)

WEEK 11 (Mar 26-28): Type III: Path of Knowledge –Gnostic Mysticism II (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.49-104
- Ibn 'Arabi (tr. Dagli), "Divine Wisdom in the Word of Adam" (will be provided)

EASTER BREAK (March 30 – April 2)

WEEK 12 (Apr 4): Concluding the Survey of the Typological study of Islamic Mysticism

Apr 4: In-class Debate

WEEK 13 (Apr 9-11): Doctrinal Teachings of Islamic Spirituality

Apr 9: Response Paper is Due Today

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.

Mystical Theology & Cosmology

Mystical Psychology and Anthropology

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

WEEK 14 (Apr 16-18): Devotion, Ritual and Prayer Life in Islamic Mysticism

Individual and Communal Ritual Practices and Meditative Life

Ritual Life: Shared and Divergent Forms and Reasons for it

Documentary: *I am a Sufi, I am a Muslim* (library website)

- Renard, *Seven Doors to Islam* 52-72 (library e-book)
- Nasr, *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*, p.131-143 & 265-293
- Kugle and Ernst, p. 129-164

WEEK 15 (Apr 23-25): History, Geography and Expressions of Islamic Mystical Life

- a. Mystical communities in the Islamic world and key figures of Islamic Mysticism
- b. Major Sufi orders, their teachings and legacy
- c. Mystical Literature & Hagiographies
- d. Futuwwa
- e. Art and architecture
- f. Sacred Music and Dance
- f. Esoteric/Hidden sciences

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

- Nasr, *Islamic Spirituality*, Chapters [1 & 8], [15 & 23], [24 & 25], [12, 6 & 19?]
- Green, *Global Sufism*, Chapter 2 & 4 (one chapter each group)

WEEK 16 (Apr 30-May 2): Beyond Islamic Mysticism: Concluding Remarks

Sharing Response Papers, Book Reports and Research Papers
 Class Discussion
 Reflections on our study
 Comparison with other religious traditions

MOVIE (over the weekend): Bab 'Azīz

Reflection Paper due on Apr 30
Relate the movie to the themes studied in the course.

Cumulative FINAL EXAM