

Islamic Mysticism

REL 277 (Fall 2012)
T & TH 1:40 – 2:55 (Chambers 1062)

Dr. Syed Rizwan Zamir

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Office Hours: Mon & Wed 12:00- 1:00; Tue 3:00 – 5:00 (or by appointment)

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 Sevenser varieties, Islamic mystical philosophy and philosophical mysticism. Our method of study will include primary sources, secondary scholarship, multimedia material, interviews and field work. In our study we will cover historical origins of these traditions, their development, key figures, doctrines and spiritual practices and influence within Islamic societies and beyond. We will 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. The final section of the course will reflect on the cultural and intellectual significance of Islamic mysticism for Islamic civilization, its response to the intellectual and civilizational challenge of modernity, and for current debates such as gender, jihad and religious pluralism.

Required Readings (available at the Bookstore):

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.

1. Bayat, Mojdeh and Mohammad Ali, *Tales from the Land of the Sufis* (Boston: Shambhala, 1994)
2. Laude, Patrick, *Pathways to an Inner Islam: Massignon, Corbin, Guenon, and Schuon* (New York: SUNY, 2010)
3. De Callatay, Godefroid, *Ikhwan al-Safa: A Brotherhood of Idealists on the Fringe of Orthodox Islam* Makers of the Muslim World Series, (Oxford: Oneworld & Oxford, 2005)
4. Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali, Ilse Lichtenstadter (Ed.), R. J. McCarthy (trans.), *Deliverance from Error: Five Key Texts Including His Spiritual Autobiography, al-Munqidh min al-Dalal* (Louisville: Fons Vitae, ?)
5. 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)
6. Spevack, Aaron. *Ghazali on the Principles of Islamic Spirituality: Selections from Forty Foundations of Religion--Annotated and Explained* (Woodstock: Skylight Illuminations, 2012)
7. *Islamic Spirituality (vol.2): Manifestations*, World Spirituality Series, Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Ed.) (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997)

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)	10%
Book Report OR Research Paper (7-page)	20%
Attendance, Presentations & Participation	15%

Objectives of the Course and Format of the Class:

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, students will have intellectual tools and enough familiarity with the mystical traditions that they will not encounter any major difficulty in pursuing further study, engaging the texts and practitioners of Islamic mystical traditions or making sense of mystical practices and Islamic spiritual thought and life. For the instructor, the success or failure of the course will be determined by reviewing how far we accomplish these goals. The format (i.e., structure of the class lecture/discussion, and presentations/assignments) and selection of readings are all carefully thought-out to meet these goals. That is why although class-discussion and conversations are the central focus of the class, the class format will be flexible and may vary from week to week. The extent and length of lectures, in-class discussion, debates and/or group work will be decided and may alter according to the needs of the class in view of these goals.

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.*

ASSIGNMENTS:

I- Response Papers:

The purpose of the response paper is to help you reflect and critically engage the materials you have learned in the class. It is not merely a summary of the readings or lectures. Instead, it gives you a chance to reflect on the aspects of readings that you find interesting, contentious, or simply unclear/confusing. In the larger picture, a response paper is 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. Without explicitly restating or summarizing readings you need to demonstrate good grasp of the relevant material. 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 paper 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 Report:

The purpose of the book report is to help you 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 the instructor regarding the appropriateness of the book. Before you begin to write your book reports, you are **required** to read at least three “academic” book reviews of books similar to the one you have picked to read. The book report has two sections: Section I will be a carefully written summary of the purpose, structure, audience, content and major arguments and evidence provided; Section II will then critically evaluate and analyze the book and its significance in light of the relevant and applicable material that you have learned throughout the semester. A book report that lacks

engagement with the assigned readings and knowledge gained during the course will be deemed incomplete.

Research paper:

Research paper is expected to meet all the requirements of a research paper. These include

- a clearly thought-out problem or question,
- A clear thesis
- scholarly evidence
- Structured and easy-to-follow organization of ideas and transitions from an idea to another
- Proper language usage
- properly formatted citations and bibliography (use Chicago)

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 (Aug 28-30): 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

Resources for and hurdles in the study of Islamic Mysticism

What is “Mysticism”?

- *Ghazali on the Principles*, 3-41
- William Harmless, *Mystics*, Chapter 10 “Reading Mystics” (library e-book)

WEEK 2 (Sep 4-Sep 6): What is Islamic Spirituality? Overview, Framework and Sources

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

- Nasr, “The Interior Life in Islam” in *Islamic Life and Thought* (Will be provided)
- Laude, *Pathways to an Inner Islam*, Chapter 1 & 2

WEEK 3 (Sep 11-13): Sources of Islamic Spirituality

Note: You should complete your reading of the introductory book on Islam by this weekend

Introduction to Islamic faith and practices

Origins of Islamic Spirituality

Sources of Islamic Spirituality (The Qur’an and the Prophet)

- *Ghazali on the Principles*, 42-111
- Laude, *Pathways to an Inner Islam*, Chapter 3 & 4 (p.61-101)

WEEK 4 (Sep 18-20): Typology of Islamic Mysticism; I- Path of Action/Ascetic-Mysticism

Characteristics of the Path of Action

Ascetic Mystical Theology and Ritual Life

Varieties within the Path of Action

Muslim Ascetics throughout History

- *Ghazali on the Principles*, 115-296

WEEK 5 (Sep 25-27): Type II- Path of Devotion/Love-Mysticism***

Love vis-à-vis Action
Theology of Love
Motifs and Themes within Love-Mysticism

Group Presentations I: *Mystical Poems of Rumi* (Instructions will be given)

- Nasr, *Islamic Spirituality: Manifestations*, Chapter 5
- *Tales from the Land of the Sufis*, 71-167
- *Mystical Poems of Rumi* (selections will be announced for group presentations)

WEEK 6 (Oct 2-4): Human and Divine Love***

Group Presentations I contd.: *Mystical Poems of Rumi*

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

- *Tales from the Land of the Sufis*, 14-27
- Renard, *Windows on the House of Islam*, 92-106 (library e-book)

WEEK 7 (Oct 9-11): Type III: Path of Knowledge –Gnostic Mysticism I/Sufism

Knowledge vis-à-vis Action & Love
Theology of Gnostic Mysticism
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*, Chapter 3 & 4
- Ibn ‘Arabi (tr. Dagli), “Divine Wisdom in the Word of Adam” (will be provided)

You need to choose the book for your book report by Oct 9

Oct 11: Midterm Exam

FALL BREAK: Fri, Oct 12 (4:30 p.m.) - Wed, Oct 17 (8:30 a.m.)

WEEK 8 (Thurs, Oct 16-18): Gnostic Mysticism II/Shi‘ite Neoplatonism

Shi‘ite Doctrines
Twelver vs. Seveners
Particularities of Shi‘ite Mystical Traditions

- H. Corbin, “Imamate” from *Shi‘ism* (will be provided)
- De Callatay, *Ikhwan al-Safa*, Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 6

WEEK 9 (Oct 23-25): Gnostic Mysticism III/Philosophy as Mysticism***

An overview of Islamic philosophy and its mystical dimensions
A Different Conception of Philosophy (Relationship between Philosophy and Mysticism)
Convergences and Divergences among Gnostic mystical traditions

- Nasr, *Islamic Spirituality*, Chapter 22
- Nasr, S. H., “Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi” from *Islamic Intellectual Tradition in Persia* (will be provided)
- “Abu Bakr Muhammad bin Zakariyya al-Razi” from *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia* (will be provided)

Oct 25: 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.

WEEK 10 (Oct 30-Nov 1): 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

I am a Sufi, I am a Muslim (Documentary)

- Renard, *Seven Doors to Islam* 35-74 (e-book)
- *Deliverance from Error*, Appendix IV & V

Group Presentations II: on *Islamic Spirituality: Manifestations*
Chapters 1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 & 14

WEEK 11 (Nov 6-8): Fruits and Expressions of Mystical Life

- a. The Qur'an and Hadith Interpretations
- c. Hagiographies
- d. Wisdom stories and sayings
- d. Futuwwa
- e. Art and architecture
- f. Esoteric/Hidden sciences

Group Presentations III: *Readings for this week*

- Nasr, *Islamic Spirituality*, Chapters 15, 23, 24 & 25
- De Callatay, *Ikhwan al-Safa*, Chapters 4 & 5

- *Tales from the Land of the Sufis*, 48-71

WEEK 12 (Nov 13-15): Critique and Contestations of 'Inner Islam'***

Esoterisms contested – polemics from within and without
 Themes in Polemics
 Theological and historical overlaps

Group Presentations IV: *Readings for this week*

- *Deliverance from Error*, 53-99, Appendix II and III
- The debate between Ghazali and Ibn Rushd (will be provided)
- Purjavadi N., "Opposition to Sufism in Twelver Shiism" (will be provided)
- Nasr. S. H., *Shi'ism and Sufism* (will be provided)
- Selections from *A Muslim Theologian's Response to Christianity* (will be provided)

WEEK 13 (Nov 20): *Tawhid: The One in the Many* (Documentary)

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

WEEK 14 (Nov 27-29): Pertinence of Islamic Mysticism Today***

Role of Islamic Mysticism within the Islamic World
 Islamic Mysticism and Contemporary Debates

Group Presentations V: *Readings for this week*

- Laude, chapters 5, 7 & 8

WEEK 15 (Dec 4-6): Beyond Islamic Mysticism: Concluding Remarks

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

BOOK REPORTS AND RESEARCH PAPERS ARE DUE ON DEC 6

- Laude, Chapter 6
- Guenon, "Haqiqah and Shar'iah in Islam" (will be provided)

Cumulative FINAL EXAM