

Seminar in Islamic Spirituality

Course Description:

This course investigates the historical development of Islamic mystical traditions and the most influential theories of mysticism, and the poetry exemplifying it, in relation to Islamic theological dogmas. It makes use of the latest scholarship on these topics combined with the use of English translations of Arabic and Persian primary sources. Students will therefore become exposed to the sources and processes of research and will be encouraged to apply these for their own research paper. No knowledge of foreign languages is required.

Readings:

The specific readings for individual lectures from sources other than the required textbooks will be available as e-reserves at the Library's IRIS web-site.

Course Requirements:

As this is a seminar course, attendance and participation are all the more important, as reflected in the final grade proportions allocated. Written reflections and questions on the readings are required for each class. Specific questions will be given to focus on, and each class will begin with one member presenting their own views. In addition, each member of the class is required to give two seminar presentations. Finally, a 3,500-4,500 word research paper is to be written.

Research Paper: The final version of the 3,500-4,500 word research paper is to be submitted during the final class of the semester. Prior to that, a two-page abstract and plan is to be submitted during the seventh week of classes.

Late papers without an official Excused Absence will be penalized by one percentile per 24 hours, or part of a 24 hour period. Papers short of the minimum length specified will be penalized according to the number of words missing. Spelling and grammar will be taken into consideration in grading all papers, which should be typed double-spaced on letter size paper. No e-mailed papers or class response sheets will be accepted.

**Plagiarism and cheating will be handled in accordance with university policy. See <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/integrity.shtml#plagiarism>

Final Grade Constituents:

30% attendance and participation,
10% response sheets,
20% seminar presentations,
40% 3,500-4,500 word research paper (including marks for abstract and plan).

Grade Scheme: A=100-90, B+= 89-87, B=86-80, C+=79-77, C=76-70, D=69-65, F=64
An incomplete ("T" grade) will not normally be given for this course.

Course Outline and Reading Assignments

Week One: Introduction and Spirituality and the Qur'an:

M. Sells, tr., *Early Islamic Mysticism*, Classics of Western Spirituality, Paulist Press, 1994. (This includes translations of the key passages in the Qur'an and its exegesis that have been used to support spiritual theories and practices.)

Week Two: Spirituality and Muhammad:

D. Chraïbi, *Muhammad: A novel*, Reinner, 1998. (This historically-informed novella of some 70 pages presents a depiction of Muhammad as a mystic by making use of the biographical reports that have been transmitted for this purpose since the eighth century).

Weeks Three and Four: Formative Sufism

A. Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*, University of California Press, 2007.
N. Calder, J. Mojaddedi and A. Rippin, eds and trs, *Classical Islam: A Sourcebook of religious literature*, Routledge, 2012.

These two books provide a combination of an analytical study of the first centuries of Sufism (9th-12th CE) and translated primary sources from that period. This combination represents the ideal material to use in order to understand the academic debates about the origins and early influences on Sufism, which accounts for most theories and practices of spirituality in the Islamic world.

Week Five: Shi'i Spirituality

M. Amir-Moezzi, tr. D. Spreight, *The Divine Guide in Early Imami Shiism*, SUNY Press, 1994.

M. Dakake, *The Charismatic Community*, SUNY Press, 2007.

N. Khusraw, tr. F. Hunzai, *Knowledge and Liberation*, Tauris, 1999.

Sufism historically sought affiliation with the Sunni establishment. Within Shi'i Islam spirituality is prominent in all early schools, before their institutionalization, as well as in later Ismaili Shiism. These studies combine influential writings about early Shiism with a translation of a major spiritual treatise by the most well-known Ismaili author, Naser Khusraw (d.1077).

Weeks Six to Nine will focus on the main theories of Sufism, as follows:

Weeks Six and Seven: Friendship with God (walaya)

J. Mojaddedi, *Beyond Dogma*, Oxford University Press, 2012.

B. Radtke and John O’Kane, eds and trs, *Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism*, Routledge, 1996.

The main theory in Islamic spirituality (both Sufism and Shi’ism) is *walaya*, which denotes closeness and the status of a protégé, and is usually translated as “Friendship with God.” The two books that will be used to explore this subject combine a new critical analysis of the historical development of this theory, including its relationship to Prophethood and the Shariah of religious scholars, as well as a translation into English of the most influential theories about this topic.

Weeks Eight and Nine: Self-annihilation (*fana*) and Oneness of Existence (*wahdat al-wujud*)

Rumi, *Signs of the Unseen*, tr. W. Thackston, Shambhala, 1999.

Ibn Arabi, *Bezels of Wisdom*, tr. R. Austin, Classics of Western Spirituality, Paulist Press, 1980.

Emerging from within the strictly monotheistic Muslim community, Sufi mystics have developed theories to account for the goal of their mystical path that are arguably compatible. As a result, the unitive experience of the mystic is described as one of “self-annihilation” and the vision of reality gained as a result is depicted as the perception that only God truly exists. The precise ways in which these theories were developed and debated will be the focus of these weeks, through reading texts in translation by the influential 13th-century mystics Rumi and Ibn Arabi .

Weeks ten to thirteen will focus on Spiritual Practices, Sufi Poetry and modern developments, as follows:

Week Ten: Deviant Asceticism

A. Karamustafa, *God’s Unruly Friends*, University of Utah Press, 2006.

Dressler, “Alevis,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3rd Edition.

For many observers, the most distinctive aspect of the practice of Muslim mystics is antinomianism, because it contrasts strongly with the Islamic juridico-theological tradition which has been the dominant expression of both Sunni and Shi’i Islam. This class will look closely at how the antinomianism that was prevalent among early mystics found avenues of expression even after the institutionalization of Sufism and Shi’i mysticism respectively.

Week Eleven: The Sama` (Meditative Listening)

K. Avery, *The Psychology of Sufi Sama*, Routledge, 2011

J. During, “What is Sufi Music?” in L. Lewisohn, ed. *Heritage of Sufism*, Vol. 2, OneWorld, 1999.

The most distinctive ritual practice of Muslim mystics is meditative listening (*sama`*) to poetry and music, often combined with dance (e.g. the Whirling Dervishes). This is also the

ritual practice discussed most extensively in Sufi writings. Through a combination of classical writings in translation (Avery), analytical studies (During) and audio-visual material, this class will consider how this ritual practice serves the purposes of Muslim mystics.

Week Twelve: Mystical Poetry

Rumi, *The Masnavi*, Oxford World's Classics, 2007

A. Schimmel, *Make a Shield of Wisdom: Poetry of Nasir-e Khusraw*, Tauris, 2001.

J. De Bruijn, *Persian Sufi Poetry*, Routledge, 1997.

Hafiz, *Your Lover's Beloved*, tr. Karimi and Wolak, Cross-cultural Communications, 2009.

The popularity of Sufi poetry in translation is a fair representation of its importance for Sufis and other Muslim mystics in the original language. Through reading translations of both lyrical and didactic poetry written by both Sufis and Shi'i mystics, as well as analytical studies of them, the reasons why poetry has been the most prominent cultural expression of Sufism will be explored.

Week Thirteen: Islamic Mysticism in the Modern World

J. Malik, ed., *Sufism in the West*, Routledge, 2006.

E. Sirriyeh, *Sufis and Anti-Sufis: the Defence, Reform and Rejection of Sufism in the Modern World*, Routledge, 1998.

In common with mysticism in other parts of the world, the modern period caused a decline in participation in the Islamic world as well as strong rejections of the whole endeavor. More recently, there has been a revival of mysticism as part of a reaction to modernist Islamic movements, including Islamism. This class will be an opportunity to look at the factors causing such shifts as well as to assess Sufi activity in contemporary America, using both analytical studies and websites.

Week Fourteen: Paper Presentations