

RE 330-002 SUFISM: MYSTICAL TRADITION OF ISLAM

FALL 2009

Prof. Olga Solovieva

MW 2:30-4:20 p.m., Tang-Whitman Room

Office hours: Tue 4-5 p.m., Th 2-3 p.m. and by appointment

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Course Description:

Mysticism as a quest for transformative knowledge and conscious experience of the ultimate reality has been an important dimension of many religious traditions and cultures of the world. In this course we will focus on Sufism—a complex and fascinating mystical tradition developed within Islam. Drawing on the Sufi texts as well as on discussions and representations of Sufism in scholarly readings, film, and other contemporary sources, we will attend to a number of crucial questions raised in the Islamic mystical practice and thought: What is the nature of God and of human self? How can we access and experience the divine reality? How does one meaningfully articulate this experience? What is the relationship between Sufism and the overall tradition of Islam? Specific topics explored in the course of this semester will include mystical appropriations of Islamic scriptures; Sufi poetry and music; various Sufi orders and their meditative techniques; the tradition of “love mysticism” as embodied by Rumi and Rabi’a of Basra; the metaphysical mysticism of Ibn al-Arabi; social contexts and roles of the Sufi movements; and some of the controversies surrounding Sufism throughout its history and in the contemporary scene.



Required Texts:

Michael Sells, Early Islamic Mysticism

Annemarie Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions of Islam

Carl W. Ernst, The Shambhala Guide to Sufism

Rumi (trans. Kabir Helminski), Love is a Stranger

Books are available for purchase at the Skidmore Bookstore; they are also placed on a 3-hour reserve at the library. Other readings will be available on-line and as handouts distributed in class; please note that it is your responsibility to obtain and keep the copies of all handouts throughout the semester. There will also be a number of videos screened in class; should you miss any screenings, please make sure you arrange to watch that video as soon as possible.

Requirements and Grading

1. Class Participation	15 points
2. Reading Journal / Reflection Papers	30 points
3. Take-Home Essay Exam	25 points
4. Research Project / Final Paper	30 points

Grading Scale

This course will be graded on the following scale (subject to re-adjustment at the instructor's discretion):

100-95 = A	75-72 = C
94-91 = A-	71-69 = C-
90-87 = B+	68-66 = D+
86-82 = B	65-62 = D
81-80 = B-	61-59 = D-
79-76 = C+	below = F

A: Active and in-depth involvement with the material as demonstrated in class discussions and written and oral assignments; outstanding quality of writing and ability to analyze and appreciate difficult concepts and ideas.

B: Above-average performance on written assignments and tests; demonstrates consistent and thoughtful engagement with the material.

C: Adequate performance on tests and written assignments; consistent participation in discussions

D: Let's not even go there...

Class participation

This is an upper-level seminar designed for self-motivated fellow-inquirers; you must be an avid reader of relatively complex and lengthy texts as well as someone who enthusiastically shares one's intellectual discoveries with fellow seekers on the path. If you decide to be in this class, I will assume that you have seriously committed yourself to these requirements. You must attend classes regularly and come to class prepared, i.e., having done the readings and willing to talk about them. I will lecture occasionally but most of our class sessions will be devoted to our discussions of the assigned readings and your responses to them. Please bring your copies of books and other readings to class and be prepared to talk about them. Your active and well-prepared participation in class discussions will raise your participation grade while no-shows or evident negligence in reading will lower it. Attendance is required and will be recorded beginning the second week of the semester. Since seminar-style setting of this class makes your presence and participation vital to the success of the course, I will ruthlessly enforce attendance policy—make no mistake about it! Each student is allowed 1 unexcused absence during the semester; each additional absence will lower your participation grade by 1 point. Please note that consistent failure to attend class (over 4 missed sessions) will result in a failing grade and/or removal from the course (yes it will break my heart to do so but I will do it nonetheless).

Reading Journal / Reflection Papers

This reading/writing assignment is designed to help you engage with the course readings in an in-depth and creative way. You are asked to identify important themes and key concepts introduced in the readings, and also—very important!—to engage with them in a critical (i.e., serious/scholarly) yet imaginative way, by offering your own interpretations and reflections. Please bring your papers to class with you and be prepared to refer to them during class discussions; occasionally, I might ask one or more of you to read your papers to the class in order to facilitate our discussion—don't be shy!, and be ready to defend and discuss the perspective you've chosen to argue for. I will collect papers after the class and return them to you once they are graded. You must submit your papers on the dates noted on the syllabus. There are 17 possible entries; you must do 12 of them; otherwise, you will lose credit for the entire assignment. No late entries will be accepted for any reason other than documented medical emergencies; please organize your time accordingly. Your papers must be at least 2 pages in length (double-spaced, standard font and margins). If you write more than 2 pages, I'll forgive you (as long as you keep it under, well, let's say, 5 pages); but if you write less than that, beware! Each paper must deal with the readings specified in the appropriate sections of the Schedule of Readings. Completed entries will be graded on a pass/fail basis: 1 = does not meet expectations; 2 = meets expectations. You will receive full credit (30 points) for this assignment as long as you get "2" or above on 11 out of 12 entries; if your completed Reading Journal contains more than 1 unsatisfactory entry, the overall grade for this assignment will be reduced by 5 points for each such additional entry (e.g., if you receive "2" on 10 entries, and "1" on 2 entries, your total will be $30 - 5 = 25$ pts). Those students who consistently submit outstanding Reading Journal entries will be awarded extra points on this assignment (0.5 point per entry, up to 2 points total).

Take-Home Essay Exam

This take-home essay exam is worth 25 points, and is due in class on November 11th. Your final output for this assignment should be 10-12 pages in length, typed (double-spaced), with standard margins and 10-12 font size. Specific essay questions and instructions will be posted on-line 5-7 days before the due date. To keep you sufficiently disciplined (should your internal self-disciplining abilities fail miserably at this point in the semester), I am imposing a 5-pt late penalty for each day that your essay is late—please keep that in mind when you are tempted to procrastinate!

Research Project

This project is worth 30 points. With the instructor's prior approval, you will select and research a topic that is relevant to the broadly defined area of our course, and is also (hopefully) of special interest to you personally. Based on this research, you will be asked to prepare a 10-15 minute oral presentation during one of the class sessions reserved for these purposes (see the Schedule of Readings). You will also be asked to submit a 10-12 page research paper (a.k.a. "final paper") due Thursday Dec. 17, by 5 p.m. Detailed guidelines for the independent project will be posted on Blackboard ("Assignments" folder).

Notes and Policies:

Disability:

Skidmore College is committed to providing students with disabilities full and meaningful access to all college programs and activities and strives to offer individualized accommodations necessary for students to realize an equal opportunity to succeed. To arrange for special accommodations, you will need to contact the Coordinator for Students with Disabilities in Student Academic Services (Starbucks Center, http://cms.skidmore.edu/academic_services/accessibility/index.cfm, tel. 518.580.8150). You should also talk to the instructor as early in the semester as possible.

Academic Integrity:

I will expect all students enrolled in this course to adhere to standards of academic integrity outlined in Skidmore's Honor Code (http://cms.skidmore.edu/student_handbook/honor-code.cfm) and avoid any forms of academic dishonesty. All suspected cases of academic dishonesty (such as plagiarism) will be referred to the Dean of Studies and may incur such penalties as a failing grade on a part or the whole of course requirements or removal from the course, at instructor's discretion.

Some Useful and Interesting Websites:

<http://www.uga.edu/islam/Sufism.html>

The most comprehensive and reliable website on Sufism, maintained by Dr. Alan Godlas (University of Georgia), contains information on various Sufi orders and masters, selected Sufi texts, classical and contemporary, as well as links to various scholarly articles dealing with various aspects of Sufi thought, history and practice, and links to the sites of Sufi orders and organizations.

<http://ias.org/departments/sufiwomen.html>

The Sufi Women Organization is an association of Muslim and non-Muslim Sufi women from around the world, of many cultures and Sufi Orders, who address humanitarian issues related to women.

<http://www.sufism.org/>

The site of the Threshold Society and Mevlevi Order located near Santa Cruz in California, headed by Shaykh Kabir and Camille Helminski

<http://www.dar-al-masnavi.org/>

A comprehensive website on Rumi and his works, by Dr. Ibrahim Gamard. This contains links to both translations and Rumi's works in Persian.

<http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/>

The Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society is an international association that was founded in 1977 to promote a greater understanding of the work of Ibn 'Arabi and his followers, with its headquarters in Oxford England and a branch in Berkeley California.

Course Outline and Schedule of Readings*

*Any changes will be announced in class, via e-mail and/or on Blackboard

All readings must be completed prior to the class period for which they are assigned; please don't forget to bring your copies of books and/or course reader to class. Reading designations: "t" = read from/to the first full paragraph at the top of the page; "m" = the middle of the page; "b" = the last full paragraph at the bottom of page; no designation at all means you should read the entire page

Sep 9 Introduction to the course

Sep 14 So, what is "mysticism"? and what is "Sufism"?

Readings: William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, selections (handout)
Reading Journal 1 due
Sallie B. King, "Two Epistemological Models for the Interpretation of Mysticism," *JAAR* 56 (1998): 257-279
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1464717>
"When the Fruit is Consumed by God: An Interview with Sheikha Fariha," *Parabola* (Fall 2009), 74-81 (handout)
Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch, "The Path of Sufism," in *Women of Sufism: A Hidden Treasure* (ed. Camille Helminski), 90-97 (handout)
Jay Kinney, "The Sufi Conundrum," *Gnosis* 30 (Winter 1994)
<http://www.lumen.org/intros/intro30.html>
Classical Sufi definitions of Sufism
<http://www.uga.edu/islam/sufism/sufismlumdef.html>

Sep 16 "What is Sufism" inquiry continued: scholarly perspectives and approaches

Readings: Carl Ernst, *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism*, 1-31
RJ 2 due
Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 3-22
Early Islamic Mysticism (hereafter *EIM*), "Preface" 1-3t
Video: *Islamic Mysticism*

[Eid-al-Fitr, the End of Ramadan Sep 20]

Sep 21 The sources of Islamic mysticism: The Qur'an

Readings: *EIM*, "Introduction" 11-19, "The Qur'an" 29-46, "Early Sufi Qur'an Interpretation" 75-96
RJ 3 due
Ernst, 32-45m
Schimmel, 23-28t

Sep 23 The sources of Islamic mysticism: Muhammad as mystical exemplar and object of devotion

Readings: *EIM*, "The Mi'raj" 47-56m, "The Mi'raj of Bistami" 242t-250
RJ 4 due
Ernst, 45m-57
Schimmel, "The Veneration of the Prophet" 213t-227

Sep 28 No class, Yom Kippur

- Sep 30 Emergence of Sufism. Early Sufi teachers**
Readings: Schimmel, 28t-41
 RJ 5 due *EIM*, “Rabi’a of Basra” 151-170
- Oct 5 Early Sufi masters on mystical “annihilation,” ecstasy and sobriety**
Readings: Schimmel, 42-51t (Dhu’n-Nun, Bistami), 57b-77b (Junayd, Hallaj)
 RJ 6 due *EIM*, “Qushayri” 119m-126m, “Bistami” 212-142t, “Junayd” 251-265, “Hallaj” 266-280
- Oct 7 The Path: stations, goals and obstacles**
Readings: Schimmel, 98-130m, 187-193m
 RJ 7 due *EIM*, “Sarraj: The Seven Stations” 196-211
 Ernst, 98b-108t
 “Obstacles on the Path” (introductory overview)
<http://www.uga.edu/islam/sufismobstacles.html>
 al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi, *Jihad al-nafs*
<http://sunnah.org/tasawwuf/jihad003.html>
- Oct 12 Sufi orders: organization and ceremonial**
Readings: Schimmel, 228-258
 RJ 8 due Ernst, 120-146
 Al-Suhrawardi, *A Sufi Rule for Novices*, selections (handout)
 For a list of and some information on various Sufi orders see
<http://www.uga.edu/islam/sufismorders.html>
- Oct 14-19 Contemplative practices and forms of worship**
Readings: Schimmel, 148t-178m
 Ernst, 81-98b, 106m-119
 RJ 9 due William Chittick, “On the Cosmology of *Dhikr*,” in *Paths to the Heart: Sufism and the Christian East*, 48-63 (handout)
 Oct 19 Michaela Ozelsel, *Forty Days*, selections in *Women of Sufism: A Hidden Treasure* (ed. Camille Helminski), 169-176 (handout)
 For some other information on *dhikr* (*zikr*) see
<http://www.uga.edu/islam/sufismdhikr.html>
Video: I am a Sufi, I am a Muslim
- Oct 21 Sufi music and dance**
Readings: Ernst, 179-198
 RJ 10 due Schimmel, “*Sama*” 178m-186
 Hazrat Inayat Khan, *The Mysticism of Sound and Music*, selections (handout)
 Also check out the following web pages for some samples of Sufi (and Islamic) music as well as for a brief look at some controversies surrounding the uses of music in Islam:
<http://www.uga.edu/islam/IsIArt.html#Music>
<http://www.freemuse.org/sw10914.asp>
Video: Sufi Soul

Ibn 'Arabi: Oneness of Being and the Science of the Heart

- Oct 26** *Readings:* Schimmel, "Ibn 'Arabi" 263t-274m
RJ 11 due Ibn 'Arabi, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, selections (handout)
William Chittick, selections (handout)
- Oct 28** *Readings:* Ibn 'Arabi, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, selections (handout)
RJ 12 due Michael Sells, "Ibn 'Arabi's *Garden Among the Flames: The Heart*
Receptive of Every Form" in Sells, *Mystical Languages of*
Unsayings, 90-115 (handout)
Henri Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the*
Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi, selections
- Nov 2** **"The boiling ecstasy of the soul": Mystical poetry of Jelaluddin Rumi**
RJ 13 due *Readings:* Rumi (trans. Kabir Helminski), *Love Is a Stranger* (entire)
Schimmel, "Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi" 309b-328m
- Nov 4** **The Feminine in Sufism. Women Sufis.**
RJ 14 due *Readings:* Ibn 'Arabi, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, selections (handout)
Claude Addas, "Women in the Life of Ibn al-'Arabi," in *Women of*
Sufism: A Hidden Treasure (ed. Camille Helminski), 109-114
(handout)
Schimmel, 426-435
Camille Helminski, "Wherever You Turn, There Is the Face of
God," in *Women of Sufism: A Hidden Treasure* (ed. Camille
Helminski), 115-127 (handout)
- Nov 9 No class, I will be at the American Academy of Religion meeting
- Nov 11** **Accessing the Divine: Dreams, visions, miracles, saints**
RJ 15 due *Readings:* Schimmel, 199t-213t
Exam Lex Hixon, "Spiritual Adventures: Dream and Pilgrimage" in
Paper *The Heart of the Qur'an*, 3-20 (handout)
due Valerie Hoffman, "The Role of Visions in Contemporary Egyptian
Religious Life," *Religion* 27:1 (1997), 45-64
<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/journal/0048721X>
Aaron Hughes, "Imagining the Divine: Ghazali on Imagination,
Dreams, and Dreaming," *JAAR* 70 (2002), 33-53 (handout)
- Nov 16** **Sufism in contemporary world: Issues, challenges, possibilities**
RJ 16 due *Readings:* Ernst, 199-228
Pir Viayat Inayat Khan, "Sufism in the Dialogue Between
Religions," *Cross Currents* Summer/Fall 1974, 220-232
Shaykh 'Abd al-Halim Mahmud (Shaykh al-Azhar), Fatwa on
Sufism <http://www.uga.edu/islam/abdalhalim.html>
The Debate on Sufism between Ibn Taymiya and Ibn 'Ata Allah
<http://sunnah.org/tasawwuf/scholar25.htm>
Nuh Ha Mim Keller, "How Would You Respond to the Claim that
Sufism is *bid'a*?" <http://sunnah.org/tasawwuf/sufisn.htm>

Abdal-Hakim Murad, "The Forgotten Revolution"
<http://web.archive.org/web/20021020001038/http://66.34.131.5/ISLAM/ahm/fgtnrevo.htm>
 Yusuf Hijazi, "Sufism" the Deviated Path" (criticism of Sufism)
<http://web.archive.org/web/20030607203044/islam.org.au/articles/22/sufism.htm>
 Also check out the links on this page for the arguments and perspectives of the opposing sides in the controversy over Sufism <http://www.uga.edu/islam/sufismislam.html>

Nov 18 American Sufis

RJ 17 due (see questions below)
Research Proposal due

Readings: "A Reality Without a Name: An Interview with Pir Zia Inayat Khan," *Parabola* (Winter 2007), 60-67
 Marcia Hermansen, "Hybrid Identity Formations in Muslim America: The Case of American Sufi Movements," *The Muslim World* 90 (2000), 158-196 (Blackboard, "Notes and handouts" folder)
 Gisela Webb, "Tradition and Innovation in Contemporary American Islamic Spirituality: The Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship" (handout)
 Also web-visit at least two of the modern Sufi groups on the list:
 The Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship website: <http://www.bmf.org/>
 Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order <http://www.ashkijerrahi.com/>
 Sufi Order International <http://www.sufiorder.org/>
 The Golden Sufi Center <http://www.goldensufi.org/>
 International Sufi Movement <http://www.sufimovement.org/work.htm>
 What are the goals of these groups? What are their major principles and teachings? What is their stance vis-à-vis non-Sufi Muslims?

Nov 23 No class, I will be at the Society of Biblical Literature meeting

Nov 25 No class, Thanksgiving break

[Eid-Al-Adha: November 27, 2009]

Nov 30- Dec 9 Research presentations

Dec 17 Research paper due by 5 p.m.