

Sunni and Shi'ite Islam

REL 276 (Spring 2013)
TTH 9:40 – 10:55 (Chambers 3187)

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Office Hours: Mon, Tue & Wed 3:15 – 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 presents 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 review of significant ecumenical themes and 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. Naumani, Shibli. *Umar* (Makers of Muslim Civilization). Oxford: OneWorld, 2012.
5. Momen, Moojan. *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism*. (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1987).
6. Nasr, Dabashi and V. Nasr. *Expectation of the Millennium: Shi'ism in History*. Albany: SUNY, 1989.
7. Safavi, S. G. *Rumi's Spiritual Shi'ism*. ?: Xlibris, 2008.

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:

Midterm Examination	25%
Final Examination	30%
Book Report (7 pages)	20%
Short assignments & Participation (includes the field trip)	10 % + 15%

Objectives of the Course:

Since it is impossible for this course to be more than an *overview of Sunni and Shi'ite Islam*, it is expected that by the end of the class, the students will have the necessary language, categories and familiarity with the two traditions to pursue further study, engage the texts and practitioners of Sunni and Shi'ite interpretations of Islam or make sense of their respective 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:

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. You will need *explicit approval* of the instructor for your choice of book. Before you begin to write your book reports, you are **required** to read *at least two* **“academic” book reviews** of books similar to the one you have picked to read to get a sense of the format and style of writing. The audience of the book report is your REL class.

The book report has **three sections**: *Section I* (4 pages) will be a carefully written summary that will include the background information of the author and his expertise on the subject, purpose for writing this book, structure, audience (who is writing for, who is he writing against), content, major arguments and evidence contained within the book. *Section II* (2 pages) 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. *Section III* (1 page) will be your personal reflections on the book regarding ways in which you found the book insightful,

confusing, useful etc. for yourself personally and in relation to the course. **Citations:** Proper citations are expected at all times. Use 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): Introduction to the Course/Islam

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

- Preliminary Remarks on the Nature of the Sunni-Shi'ite Divide
- Some Common Misperceptions about Shi'ism & 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

Week 2 (Jan 22 – 24): Introduction to Islam & the Early Islamic History

Readings: Ayoub: Introduction - p.80

Jan 22: Documentary *Islam: Empire of Faith*

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

- The Crisis
- The Saqifah Debate
- Arguments made by the Contenders of the Succession
- Introduction to Islam, Origins of Islam, The Prophet's Life (Meccan and Medinan Period), The Muslim Community during the Prophet's times

Week 3 (Jan 29 – 31): Early Islamic History II: The Rightly Guided Caliphs

Readings: Ayoub: 81- 144;

- Key Features of the Caliphate of the 'Umar
- The Second Crisis
- The Caliphate of Uthman & 'Ali

Week 4 (Feb 5 – 7): Sunni-Shi'ite Interpretations of the Early Islamic History

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

ONLINE LECTURES & CLASS PRESENTATIONS:

<http://quilliampress.com/video/the-khilafa-of-abu-bakar/>

<http://quilliampress.com/video/the-khilafa-of-umar/>

<http://quilliampress.com/video/the-khilafa-of-uthman/>

<http://quilliampress.com/video/the-khilafa-of-ali/>

Feb 5: In groups of THREE you will listen to lectures on the four caliphs (links above) and present (in no more than 10 minutes) the summary in the class.

- The Question of Succession to the Prophet
- *Ahl al-bayt* vs. *Sababa*
- Political and Spiritual Authority in Islam: Caliphate vs. Imamate
- Sunni and Shi'ite view of Islamic History
- The Term “Shi'a”: Origins of the Shi'ites in Islamic History & The Early Shi'ites

Week 5 (Feb 12 – 14): Shi'ite Beliefs

Readings: Tabatabai, 123-176 & 184-190; Momen, Ch. 7; Read at least one section from the section “On the Unity of God” from *A Shi'ite Anthology* (**online**)

<http://www.al-islam.org/anthology/index.htm>

FEB 12 (FIRST IN-CLASS DEBATE): *Sunni-Shi'ite Interpretations of Early Islamic History*

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

Week 6 (Feb 19 – 21): Imamology II: Lives and Teachings of the Imams

Readings: Tabatabai, 177-184; Momen, Chapter 8; Tabatabai 190-214; Nasr, 74-82; Pick 20 sayings of your choice from 'Ali's *Nahj al-Balāghah* (**online**)

<http://www.al-islam.org/masoom/sayings/saying5.html>

- *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

Week 7 (Feb 26 – 28): Sunni Veneration of the Companions and *ahl al-bayt*

Readings: 'Umar (selections- will be announced); other readings TBA

- The Concept and Significance of *Sahābah*
- What about *Ahl al-Bayt*?
- The Four Caliphs, the Promised Ten and Scribes

Feb 28: The Midterm Exam

SPRING BREAK

FRIDAY, March 1 (4:30 P.M.) – MONDAY, March 11 (8:30 A.M.)

Week 9 (Mar 12 – 14): Shi'ite Religious and Spiritual Life

Readings: Momen, Chapter 9 & 233-238; Tabatabai, 231-233 & 223-230; Amir-Moezzi, 431-460; Read B. 'Ali Zayn al-'Abidin, the Fourth Imam from “The Spiritual Life: Prayer and Supplication”

<http://www.al-islam.org/anthology/index.htm>

In Class: A Supplication of the Prophet Muhammad *Al-Jawshan Al-Kabir 1*

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Ro_u_fw-L8&list=PLC844D37DE69A208B&index=11

In Class: *Du'a Kumayl*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4RxOcp0owoQ&list=PLC844D37DE69A208B>

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

March 14 (Thurs) or March 16 (Sat): Field Trip to Al-Zabra Islamic Center, Charlotte

Week 10 (Mar 19 – 21): The Battle of Karbala: Commemorations & the Aftermath

Readings: Momen, 238-244; Clarke, 55-61 & 375-388 (will be provided); Takim, 64-77 (will be provided); “An Open Letter to IEC Board on the purpose of Muharram Processions”

<http://www.ibn-tv.com/2013/01/an-open-letter-to-the-iec-board-on-the-purpose-of-muharram-processions/>

Mar 19: Documentary: *The Ten Days* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRLoauUNit4>

Mar 21: *Ziyarat al-Ashurah* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=28-YI7mZltc>

- The Battle of Karbala
- Martyrdom in Shi'ism

- Shi'ite Commemorations of Karbala
- Impact of the incident of Karbala and Shi'ite Sectarian Identity
- Karbala and Husayn in the Sunni Tradition
- A Martyr of Humanity? Husayn and Karbala beyond the Islamic Tradition

Week 11 (Mar 26 – 28): Toward Esoteric Shi'ism

Readings: Amir-Moezzi, 133-168, 403-429, 270-275 & 277-304

- Exoteric/Esoteric religion (*Nubuwwa/Walaya*)
- Shi'ite Esoteric Sacred History
- Esoteric Eschatology
- Imam as the Divine Guide
- Shi'ism as the Initiatic Path
- Divinity of the Imam?
- Shi'ite Mystical anthropology

EASTER BREAK

Friday, March 29 (4:30 p.m.) – Wednesday, April 3 (8:30 a.m.)

Week 12 (Apr 4): Shi'ite Political Theory and Development of the Shi'ite Clerical Authority

Readings: Momen: Chapter 10 & p. 222-232; Nasr, p.107-114, 280-300; 334-367

Short Assignment (1-2 pages): *Bring three examples of verses from the Qur'an that in your view will be read differently by the Sunnis and the Shi'ites. What's the potential variance in interpretation and why?* **DUE APR 4**

- Development of Shiite Jurisprudence and Legal Methodology (*usul al-fiqh*)
- The Rise of the Notion of *ijtihad* & the School of Hilla
- Prerogatives of the Imam, the Emergence of Juristic Hierarchy (*marja'iyah*) and the Office of *Mujtabid* as the Supreme Jurisprudent (*'alamiyya*)
- *Usuli-Akhhari* Divide
- Khomeini and the Iranian Revolution
- Shi'ism and Modern Iran

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

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

Week 13 (Apr 9-11): Shi'ite Thought & Intellectual History

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

April 11: Book Report is Due

- Shi'ite Intellectual History (An Outline)
- Qur'anic Exegesis, Hadith Scholarship, Law and Theology
- Philosophical Developments within the Shi'ite World
- Mysticism within the Shi'ite Tradition
- *Usuli-Akhhari* Divide

Week 14 (Apr 16 – Apr 18): Diversity within Shi'ism

Readings: Tabatabai, Chapter 2; Momen, 54-56, 65-68; other readings TBA

- Zaydism,
- Isma'ilis,
- *Ghulat* Sects
- Shi'ism in regions other than Iran

Week 15 (Apr 23 – 25): Sunni-Shi'ite Polemics

Readings: *Peshawar Nights* (In groups you will be asked to discuss readings in the class)

<http://fatimiyya.net/v313/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Peshawar-Nights.pdf>

- Major and Recurring Themes in Sunni-Shi'ite Polemics

Week 16 (Apr 30 – May 2): Contemporary Ecumenical Efforts & the Role of Sufism

Readings: *Rumi's Spiritual Shi'ism* (selections – will be announced) Ayoub, "Conclusion"; Nasr, "Shi'ism and Sufism" (will be provided); Schuon, "Seeds of a Divergence" (will be provided)

APRIL 30 (In-Class Debate): *Polemics between Sunnis and Shi'ites*

Response Paper (500 word) = *On which side of the Sunni-Shi'ite divide you find yourself and why?*

DUE MAY 2

- Reconciliatory efforts from both sides in the modern age
- Sufism, the meeting ground?
- Contemporary theological reflections on the Sunni-Shi'ite divide