

RELI 0258 The Qur'an

Fall 2011

T, Th 9:30-10:45

Library 201

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Office hours: Mondays and Thursdays 3:00–4:30 pm, and by appointment

Course Description

In this course, we will study Islam through its sacred text, the Qur'an. We will focus on cosmology (God, human nature, Satan, and the afterlife), ethical principles, ritual prescriptions, and legal injunctions. We will also examine prominent symbols, images, and rhetorical structures of the Qur'an. In reading prophetic narratives, we will compare qur'anic and Biblical accounts of the major prophets shared by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. We will also examine the role of the Qur'an in Muslim devotion and as a medium for artistic expression. Special emphasis will be placed on the tradition of qur'anic exegesis, especially the exegesis of the verses that inspire the most debate today: inter-communal and inter-religious relations, and gender.

Please beware that lecture will sometimes be divided into two sections: treatment of the qur'anic verses you have read for the day and treatment of the secondary materials. The two parts will not always cover the same theme. For instance, on week 3 we'll be covering the qur'anic theory of human nature, while also covering the Prophet's Medinan mission and the verses that are thought to have come down during that period. Some crucial topics affected by the Qur'an, i.e. arts and culture; and a good bulk of socio-political issues, are scantily covered in the Qur'an, if at all. This division of class time will give you the broadest mental map of the topic by fusing topics internal to the Qur'an with the treatment of qur'anic application in the real world.

Course Requirements & Policies

You are expected to attend every class having done the assigned reading and to participate meaningfully in discussions.

Expectations and Assignments

- 1) Careful reading of material before class, full attendance, active participation in class discussions and debates. We will have one official class debate on unveiling but all class periods are open for debating: 25%
- 2) Two 2-3 page (Times, 12) papers (20% each).
- 3) Final work in the form of a 8-10 page research paper (35%).

The research paper, on a topic of your own design, subject to approval, is to be roughly eight pages in length, not including the bibliography. If you wish to write a research paper, you should consult with me about topics and sources and then, no later than office hours on Thursday,

November 8, outlining the questions you plan to address and material you plan to use. I am willing to consider proposals on any topic within the general field of Qur'anic Studies, as long as sufficient materials are available, and the guiding research question is well formulated. The research papers will be evaluated on the basis of three qualities: use of sources, depth of insight and analysis, and organization and clarity of writing. Although I am calling this a research paper and expect you to identify and use several sources, the paper can also involve a close reading of a primary text. Most important is to remember that the paper must reflect not only research but argument. I do not want to read reports or summaries; I will be looking for and expecting analysis and insight of your own.

For the research paper, in addition to the library catalog, I strongly suggest you use two scholarly databases, Index Islamicus, and JSTOR for scholarly articles. If some material you need is not available in our library, use NExpress and inter-library loan (ILL) to obtain materials.

NOTE 1: I make an effort to encourage and recognize improvement in performance over the course of the semester, and such improvement may be factored into the final grade.

NOTE 2: When you send me an email, please note that it might take me up to 48 hours to get the information and respond to you. Plan accordingly.

NOTE 3: Since every group of students is unique, the syllabus is subject to change depending on your needs.

Late Assignments

Papers submitted late without prior arrangement or acceptable reason will be marked down a half letter grade for each day they are late. Having too many papers due at the same time does not constitute an acceptable reason. Extensions will *only* be granted in case of serious illness or extreme emergency.

Course Objectives and Themes

We have two **principal objectives** in this course:

- 1) To cultivate your *critical thinking* skills about religion and Islam specifically. By critical thinking skills, I include the abilities to recognize, analyze, and criticize arguments in the contexts of reading, writing, thinking, news reports and discussions. I expect you to do this not only with others' positions but, more importantly, with your own positions.
- 2) To encourage you to be *active learners* about Islamic cultures. By an active learner I mean a person who has the curiosity, confidence, and passion to take the initiative to seek information that will make the recognition, analysis, and criticism of arguments—once again, both others' and your own— more poignant, penetrating, and insightful.

Special Needs

Students with documented needs regarding accommodations for testing, writing, or oral presentations in this class should make arrangement as early in the semester as possible to ensure that they may be implemented in a timely fashion. Please contact Jodi Litchfield, the ADA Coordinator, at litchfie@middlebury.edu or 802-443-5936 for information on the proper procedures. All discussions will remain confidential.

Academic Honesty

Plagiarism is a serious academic offence. In keeping with college policy, suspected cases of plagiarism will be referred to the Dean of Students' Office and can lead to suspension. Plagiarism is a violation of intellectual honesty. Plagiarism is passing off another person's work as one's own. It is taking or presenting as one's own the ideas, research, writings, creations, or inventions of another. It makes no difference whether the source is a student or a professional in some field. Paraphrasing is the close restatement of another's idea using approximately the language of the original. Paraphrasing without acknowledgement of authorship is also plagiarism and is as serious a violation as an unacknowledged quotation.

Please consult me if you have any questions or concerns.

Required Texts

Michael Sells	<i>Approaching the Qur'an</i>
Abdullah Yusuf Ali	<i>The Holy Qur'an</i>
Toshihiko Izutsu	<i>Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an</i>

The Bible, any edition – this has not been ordered – students may use their own editions; searchable online versions found at www.biblegateway.com

Additional Material on Moodle

All additional reading and visual material will be posted on Moodle. I will be adding materials to the site as we progress through the semester.

Useful Reference Works

The Encyclopedia of the Qur'an.

The Encyclopedia of Islam.

Anchor Dictionary of the Bible.

<http://www.islamic-awareness.org/Quran/Text/Mss/index.html#el>, a cite containing samples of early Qur'ānic manuscripts

Qur'an online sources: <http://www.quranexplorer.com> or <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/k/koran>

Suggested further reading

Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*

Ingrid Mattson, *The Story of the Qur'an: its history and place in Muslim life*

Burton, *Collection of the Qur'an.*

Neil Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an*

Jane D. McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians.*

Gordon Newby, *The Making of the Last Prophet*.
Irfan Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs*.
Bell and Watt, *Introduction to the Qur'an*.

Course Schedule

I. *Introductions*

Week 1

Tu 9/13---Introductions, syllabus and personal writing piece on 9/11

9/11 Assignment

You will be asked to write a one-page exploratory/personal essay responding to the questions below **during class** (what is important to me are your ideas; don't waste too much time on structure and grammar). Although required and read for content, this essay will nevertheless **not be graded**. You will be asked to write another one-page follow-up to these same questions during week 10 (which will also be read but not graded):

Questions

- 1) How has the world/US changed in the last ten years?
- 2) What have you as a citizen of the world learned about yourself, Islam and the Qur'an as a result of 9/11?
- 3) How is the West, or your area of the world, better integrated or more divided, now, than before 9/11?

Th 9/15---Introduction to Muslim world; basics of Islamic belief & practice; the Qur'an in Muslim life

Qur'an as symbol/talisman, ceremonial use and recitation of Qur'an

Qur'an: revelation process (44:3-4, 2:185, s.97, 25:32, 17:105-6, 59:21, 85:21-22, 56:77-9)

Madigan, "Themes and Topics [of the Qur'an]" ,79-94.

Read: Sells, *Approaching the Qur'an*, 1-31, 145-165, 199-224.

Week 2

Tu 9/20---Pre-Islamic background of the Qur'an

Qur'an: God/divine attributes and relationship b/w God and creation (2:255, 59:22-24, 6:12-14, 50:16, 24:35 & 40, s.112, 42:4-5, 19:88-93, 22:74-76, 28:88, 55:26-7, 3:27-27)

Izutsu, ch.3 (45-54, the pessimistic conception of the earthly life)

Izutsu, ch.4 (55-73, spirit of tribal solidarity)

II. *Style, Structure and Basic Features of the Text*

Th 9/22---Structure of the Qur'an; Style and content of the Qur'an

Structure: divisions, surah numbers/titles/order, indices/tables of contents

Style: linguistic/poetic features and literary genres/topics; translation/transliteration

Qur'an: the created world, its purpose, all submitted to God (51:56-7, 38:27, 22:18, 23:115, 3:83, 17:44, 24:41)

Nelson, (History, nature & form of Qur'an), 1-13

Sells, "Hearing the Qur'an", 145-180.

In class we will spend some time on calligraphy and listening to various recitations.

Recommended: M. Lings, *The Quranic Art Of Calligraphy And Illumination* (New York: Interlink Books, 1987), 11-19, 53-55, 71-78

And Website: Smithsonian Museum of Natural History

http://www.mnh.si.edu/epigraphy/e_islamic/islamic.htm

III. *History of Revelation and Scripture*

Week 3

Tu 9/27---Life of Muhammad: From Birth to Prophethood & Meccan Period

Qur'an: revelation/prophethood (42:51-2, 16:89, 28:75, 35:23, 11:12, 88:21-22, 22:52, 3:79, 14:11, 21:7-9 & 27-29, 41:6, 17:94-5, 53:1-18)

Mattson, "The Prophet Conveys the Message", 25-76.

Th 9/29---Life of Muhammad: Madinan Period

Madinan prophet from Hijra to death

Qur'an: human creation/human nature (*fitra*) (creation process - 6:2, 23:12-15, 15:26, 55:14)

Qur'an: human nature (30:30, 7:179, 95:4-5, 70:19-21, 4:128, 21:37, 11:8-10, 41:49-51)

Izutsu: ch.5 (the Islamization of old Arab virtues), 74-104.

Izutsu: ch.6 (the basic moral dichotomy), 105-116.

Prompts for first response paper (2-3 pages) on "Assembly and Promulgation of the Text" handed out. Read 10/4 readings with these questions in mind.

Week 4

Tu 10/4---Assembly and Promulgation of the Text

Writing, collection, canonization and promulgation of the text, during and after Muhammad's life

Qur'an: jinn (15:26-27, 18:50, 46:29-31, 55:14-15, s.72)

Leemhuis, (from palm leaves to the internet), 145-157.

Other readings TBA

IV. The Meccan Revelations: Style, Content & Symbolism

Th 10/6---Structure, style and symbolism in Meccan verses

Qur'an: satan, the enemy, deceives (43:62, 29:38, 12:5, 17:53, 35:6, s.114, 6:43, 8:48, 28:15, 4:118-121)

Discussion of Sells' translation: Sells, 14-28 (the Meccan surahs)

Reading TBA

Week 5

Tu 10/11---Cosmology: Beings

God, angels, humans, prophets, jinn/iblis, shaytan, other creatures/things;

Qur'an: sacred history/mythic narrative/eschatology (God creates/says "be!" - 36:82, 2:117, 3:47, 3:59, 6:73; covenant - 7:172)

Qur'an: creation of world/life on earth/in 6 days (21:30-34, 7:54, 10:3, 11:7, 25:59); measuring time (32:5, 70:4)

Burrell, "Creation", 141-161.

Th 10/13---Cosmology: Relationships

relationship between God and creation (*ibada*); concept of *tawhid*

Qur'an: the concept of guidance (6:110, 4:115, 13:11, 8:53, 91:7-8, 22:46, 5:44-48/65-69)

Chittick, "Worship", 218-237.

Week 6

Tu 10/18---Cosmology: Sacred History

Creation narratives/mythical timeline (creation, origin of life, making of adam/humans, the covenant, the first sin, the *dunya*, the breaking of the world, the judgment, the akhira/heaven/hell), Adam and Creation.

Genesis 1-4;

Qur'an 2:29-39, 117; 7:10-36, 54; 10:1-10; 20:115- 123; 23:12-22; 29:19-20; 32:4-11; 36:77-83; 50:38; 57:4-6; 79:27-33 and *Surah* 35.

Focus questions for reading:

1. How long does the process of creation take in the Bible? How long does it take in the Quran? Compare and contrast the descriptions of the process of creation in both accounts.
2. Do the accounts of creation proceed chronologically in the Bible and the Quran?
3. What can you discover about the relationships of created things/ beings with each other and with God in both accounts?
4. How many creation stories do there seem to be in both versions?
5. Compare and contrast the role of Eve in the Bible with the role of Adam's wife in the

Qur'an (she is not named in the Qur'an).

6. Compare and contrast the role of the serpent in the Bible with that of Iblis/Satan in the Qur'an.

Th 10/20---Cosmology: continued

Qur'an: End of the world/resurrection/judgment (50:20-35, 79:34-5, 81:1-14, 80:33-42, s.99, s.101, 69:13-37, 41:19-22, 39:67-75); God's judgment b/w religious communities (22:17)

Marcia Hermansen, "Eschatology", 308-325.

Subject to change: We might or might not cover Theodicy; if we don't, it is a great topic for papers. Sherine Hamdy, "Islam, Fatalism, and Medical Intervention: Lessons from Egypt on the Cultivation of Forbearance and Reliance on God", 173-196.

Week 7

Tu 10/25 (no class; midterm recess)

Th 10/27---The "sign" (*ayah*) of God; Qur'anic symbolism and parables

The concept of guidance, signs in revelation, and in nature, history and ourselves; revelation/prophethood (*nabi*, *rasul*, Gabriel); prominent symbolism (e.g. water, fire, darkness, rock/ground, gardens); key parables

Qur'an: nature signs/symbolism/parables (3:190-1, 22:73, 27:60-65, 29:41, 13:16, 14:24-7, 24:39-40, 75:36-40)

V. Major Figures in the Qur'an

Week 8

Tu 11/1---Adam, Eve and Satan

Bible: Gen.1 – Gen.3 (on Adam, Eve, serpent)

Qur'an: on Adam/Eve/Satan (2:30-9, 7:11-25, 15:26-50, 20:115-123, 38:71-85)

Stowasser, (Eve in the Qur'an and exegesis), 25-38.

Focus questions for reading:

- 1) There are two main terms for the devil in the Qur'an: *al-Shaytan*, which appears to derive from Hebrew *Satan*, and *Iblis*, which may derive from Greek *diabolos*. Are the characters represented by these two names identical?
- 2) Is one name associated with specific accounts or aspects of the devil's character more than the other?
- 3) In which surahs or passages do each of these terms appear?

- 4) Do the two names show up in the same passages, or may we distinguish *Shaytan*-passages and *Iblis*-passages?
- 5) If this is possible, what does it imply? What does this tell us about the history of the Qur'anic text or the prophecy of Muhammad?

Second response paper (2-3 pages) is on Adam, Eve and Satan readings. It will be due in my office by 4:00pm Friday 11/4. Suggestion: Jot down notes during the discussion in class and start the writing process as soon as possible after class when the ideas are still fresh in your mind.

Th 11/3---Noah; Abraham and family Mary, John, Jesus;

Bible: Gen.5:28 - Gen.9 (on Noah)

Qur'an: Noah (s.71 all, 7:59-64, 23:23-30, 29:14-15, 11:25-49)

Bible: Gen 11-18, 21-22 (on Abraham & family)

Qur'an: Abraham and family (6: 74-83, 11:69-3, 19:41-50, 21:51-70, 37:83-113, 51:24-37)

Qur'an: Mary/John/Jesus (3:33-60, 4:157-9, 5:46-7, 5:109-18, 19:1-34, 43:63-5, 5:17)

Stowasser, (Mary in the Qur'an and exegesis), 67-82.

VI. Ethical Principles of the Qur'an

Concepts: *kufr*, *zulm*, *shirk*, *iman*, *shukr*, *husn*, *su'*, *taqwa*, *hudud*

Week 9

Tu 11/8---Spiritual foundations of ethics

Qur'an: general/collective ethical injunctions: 2:177, 6:151-153, 16:90-97, 17:26-37, 23:96, 31:14-9, 33:35, 42:36-9

Qur'an: ethics and etiquette in speech (4:148, 49:11-12, 59:9-10); faithfulness/sincerity (3:76-77, 4:58, 5:89, 16:91-92, 16:94-95, 17:34-35)

Izutsu: ch.7 (119-155, the inner structure of the concept of *kufr*)

Izutsu: ch.8 (156-177, the semantic field of *kufr*)

Hard copy of brief proposal for research paper due no later than office hours on Thursday, November 8, outlining the questions you plan to address and material you plan to use.

Th 11/10---Virtues: generosity, bravery, trustworthiness, honesty, patience and justice

Qur'an: etiquette with parents (4:1, 17:23-24, 29:8, 31:14-15, 46:15); etiquette with God/Prophet/religion (sincerity in religion - 6:68, 6:70, 7:29; visiting mosques – 9:17-19; reciting Qur'an: 7:204-5, 16:98, 73:20, 75:16-19, 5:101-102; with Prophet – 2:104, 9:61,

33:53/56); etiquette, generally (s.49, 58:11)
Izutsu: ch.10 (184-202, the believer/*mu'min*)
Izutsu: ch.11 (204-249, good and bad)

Materials for de-veiling debate handed out; groups determined.

VII. The Madinan revelations: Moral law and The Exegetical Tradition, Past and Present

Trends/concepts: conservative/traditionalist, salafi/Islamist, modernist/liberal, progressive

Issues: gender/sexuality, (inter-)communalism/politics

Methods: exegesis, tafsir/ta'wil, asbab al-nuzul, abrogation

Types of exegesis: legal/hadith/theological/mystical

Week 10

Tu 11/15--- A: New Readings and Approaches to Tafsir; Current Issues, Translations

Rotraud Wielandt, "Exegesis of the Qur'an: Early Modern and Contemporary," EQ, v. 2, 124-142.

Reading TBA

Th 11/17---B: Family & Gender Relations

Topics: modesty/hijab, gender interactions

Qur'an: idea of clothing (7:26-27); modesty/veiling/segregation (*hijab*) (24:30-31, 24:60, 33:32-33, 33:53-55, 33:59)

Reading TBA.

Debate on deveiling to be held in class.

**Thanksgiving Week
NO class on 11/22 or 11/24**

Week 11

Tu 11/29---C: Family & Gender Relations, contd.

Topics: authority, sexuality, marriage, divorce

Qur'an: sexuality, marriage, divorce: shared natures (4:1); kindness to females (4:127); marriage is love/mercy (30:21); marriage partners (2:221, 4:2-3, 4:22-25, 5:5, 24:32-33); marriage procedures (2:235, 4:25); marital life/kindness to wives (4:19-21, 4:34); marital sexuality (2:223); nursing (2:233); marital disputes/arbitration/fairness (4:35, 4:128-30); divorce procedures (2:228-232, 2:236-7, 65:1-2/4/6-7); widowhood (2:234); fornication/penalty (17:32, 24:2-5); interspousal accusation of fornication (24:6-9)
Mubarak, 261-288, interpreting Q 4:34

Reading TBA

Tu 12/1---D: Intercommunal Relations (War & Peace)

Firestone, Qur'anic teachings on war, 1-19.

Wild, (political interpretation of the Qur'an), 273-287.

Week 12

Tu 12/6—Peer-review time for papers

Th 12/8—Peer-review time for papers; one page follow-up to personal reflection on 9/11.

Hard copy of Final research paper due in my office on Tu 12/13 between 9-4.