

RS 3131a

The Spirituality of Muslim Women

Course Outline



Instructor: Ingrid Mattson, PhD
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Department of Theology, Room A227
519-438-7224, ext. 269
*Email is the preferred method of communication.

Time and Days: Wednesdays 3:30-6:30

Room: V210

Prerequisites: none

Course Description and Goals:

In this class we will explore the spirituality of Muslim women past and present. We begin with a study of the portrayal of women in the Qur'an and the lives of female companions of the Prophet Muhammad whose concerns and perspectives helped shape the spiritual development of the early Muslim community. In later centuries, we will look at the roles women have played in the establishment of religious discourses and institutions and discuss challenges Muslim women have faced in fulfilling their spiritual needs in diverse societies. We will consider many more questions, such as how spirituality is embodied by women and the impact of such practices as gender segregation and *hijab*. Does the elevation of "the feminine" in traditional spirituality contribute to Muslim women's spiritual empowerment or the contrary? What are the spiritual practices and understandings of major life cycles? How do women understand the spiritual dimensions of marriage and celibacy, motherhood and childlessness, intimacy and abuse?

Learning Goals:

- To know what the Qur'an says about women and gender
- To understand different hermeneutical approaches to the Qur'an and the Sunnah and various legal methodologies that impact women
- To be able to identify at least a dozen prominent Muslim women religious leaders in history or contemporary society
- To be able to discuss the ways in which Muslim women's spirituality is the same or different as men's spirituality
- To identify the way culture and social structures shape and impact Muslim women's spirituality.

Course Materials:

All readings will be uploaded to OWL. You are only required to bring for the first few weeks of class a translation of the Qur'an. I recommend Muhammad Asad or Muhammad Abdul Haleem's translation. If you know any Arabic, make sure you have the Arabic Qur'an handy as well.

Grading:

1. **Participation: 10%**
Students are expected to respond in class to required readings and engage in discussions. Students will lose 2 points/day for unexcused absences from class after one absence.
2. **Presentation 30%:** Each student will make a 20 minute presentation in class about a historical or contemporary Muslim woman religious or spiritual leader, religious scholar or activist who expresses herself through Islamic religious discourse. The presentation should be accompanied by a one-page

handout and will be scheduled by the instructor during the second week of class once we see how many students are in the class. You must request approval for the subject of your presentation from the instructor. A list of possible subjects will be supplied, or you may suggest your own subject.

3. **Book report 20%:** Students will submit one 1200-word book report on a book approved by the instructor. A list of possible books for review will be supplied, or you may suggest your own title.
4. **Research paper or project 40%:** A research paper of 8-10 pages must on a topic approved by the instructor. In addition to any monographs the student may find on the topic, he or she should also consult the *Index Islamicus*, *JSTOR*, the *Religion Index* or another source to search for relevant scholarly articles. In lieu of a paper, students may develop projects in which they integrate and apply what they have learned in the course. Examples of possible projects include: A presentation designed for a faith community/community group; writing and submitting entries for Wikipedia; designing and installing a creative expression of ideas/people discussed in the class. All projects must be approved in advance.
****MTS Students will write a 12-15 page paper.**

OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION

1. Use of Electronic Devices during Class

I do not allow the use of a laptop or other electronic devices during class, even to record notes. Studies have shown that such usage blocks deeper comprehension and analysis of the ideas being presented and discussed. Please read this article: <http://www.educationnews.org/technology/study-laptops-in-the-classroom-can-distract-hinder-learning/> and this article: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/21/technology/21brain.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>. If, having read these articles, you still are determined to take notes on your laptop, you must submit a request in writing to the professor, explaining why you believe this will improve your learning and what you will do to ensure that your screen does not distract others.

2. Use of Electronic Devices during Tests and Exams

No electronic devices may be used during tests and exams unless required for a documented medical condition or learning disability.

3. **Academic Offences:** Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following web site: <http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholoff.pdf>."

4. Plagiarism-detecting Software/Computer Marking:

A) All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

5. Support Services:

- UWO Registrar's Office: <http://www4.registrar.uwo.ca>
- Huron's Faculty of Theology, Office of the Dean: http://www.huronuc.on.ca/faculty_of_theology/info_for_current_students
- srice@uwo.ca, 519-438-7224, ext. 289
- Huron's Writing Skills Centre: http://www.huronuc.on.ca/student_life/writing_services
- UWO Student Support and Development Services: http://communications.uwo.ca/current_students/student_services.htm

6. Accommodation for absences:

If documentation is required for either medical or non-medical academic accommodation, then such documentation must be submitted by the student directly to your Faculty's Dean's office (or academic counselor),

and not to the instructor. For the Faculty of Theology, all such documentation must be submitted to room A120. It will be the Dean's office that will determine if accommodation is warranted.

a) Non-medical absences and late work:

Points will be deducted from the participation grade after two unexcused absences from class. 5% will be deducted per day for late assignments.

A request for relief be submitted to the Dean's Office in order for accommodation for non-medical absences from tests and examinations to be considered.

b) Medical absences: See also the Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness:

<http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/medical.pdf>

For work representing 10% or more of the overall grade for the course, a student must present documentation indicating that the student was seriously affected by illness and could not reasonably be expected to meet his/her academic responsibilities. Documentation must be submitted as soon as possible to your Faculty Dean's office (Huron Arts & Social Science students should take their documentation to the Academic Counsellor, through the Academic Services Centre at Huron), together with a Request for Relief specifying the nature of the accommodation requested. The request and documentation will be assessed and appropriate accommodation will be determined by the Dean's office in consultation with the instructor(s.) Academic accommodation will be granted ONLY where the documentation indicates that the onset, duration and severity of the illness are such that the student could not reasonably be expected to complete his/her academic responsibilities.

The UWO Student Medical Certificate (SMC) and Request for Relief are available at the Student Centre website (<https://studentservices.uwo.ca/secure/index.cfm>), Huron University College Academic Counselling website (www.huronuc.on.ca) or from the Dean's Office or Academic Services Centre at Huron.

SCHEDULE

September 14

Introduction

For those who have not taken an Islamic/Muslim Studies class before, read: Susan Douglass, "The Fabric of Muslim Daily Life".

Women in the Qur'an

- Eve: 2:30-39; 7:11-33; 20:116-123
- Mary: 3:35-54; 19:1-34; 21:89-93; 23:50; 21:51-93
- Four women: 66:10-12

The Mothers of the Believers

- Qur'an 33:6; 33:28-34; 24:1-33; 60:7-13

September 21

Qur'anic Hermeneutics and Women in the Qur'an

- Mattson, selections from *The Story of the Qur'an*, Chapter Two, pp. 68-73.
- Amina Wadud, "Alternative Qur'anic Interpretation and the Status of Muslim Women," from *Windows of Faith*.

The Positive and Negative Contributions of Tafsir

- Barbara Freyer Stowasser, "The Chapter of Eve," Chapter 2 from *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).
- [Lecture by Mattson on "Occasions of Revelation" and the responsiveness of Qur'an to women – in class]

September 28

Gender and Divine Ontology

- Asma Barlas, "The Patriarchal Imaginary of Father/s: Divine Ontology and the Prophets," Chpt. 4 of *Believing women in Islam: Unreading patriarchal interpretations of the Qur'an* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 93-128.

Can Women be Prophets?

- Hajar: Reading from Mattson, *The Story of the Qur'an*, Chapter One
- Lynda Clarke, "Prophecy and Women Prophets," in *Encyclopedia of Women in Islamic Cultures*

The Prophet Muhammad and Women

- Mohja Kahf, "Braiding the Stories: Women's Eloquence in the Early Islamic Era" in *Windows of Faith: Muslim Women's Scholarship and Activism*, Gisela Webb, ed. (Syracuse UP, 2000).
- OR for those who read Arabic: Read introduction to and browse through 'Abd al-Halim Abu Shuqqah, *Tahrīr al-mar'ah fī 'aṣr al-Risālah, dirāṣah 'an al-mar'ah, jāmi'ah li-nuṣūṣ al-Qur'ān al-Karīm wa-Ṣaḥīḥay al-Bukhārī wa-Muslim*

October 5

Hadith Methodology and Women

- Fatima Mernissi, "Introduction," from *The Veil and the Male Elite*.
- Khaled Abou El Fadl, "Faith-based assumptions and determinations demeaning to women," chapter 7 of *Speaking in God's name: Islamic law, authority and women*. (pp. 209-218)

October 12

Women and Religious Scholarship

- Selections from Ruth Roded, *Women in Islamic Biographical Collections: From Ibn Sa'd to Who's Who* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Pub., 1994), pp. 3; 143-144.
- Johathan P. Berkey, "Women and Islamic Education in the Mamluk Period," Chapter 8 from *Women in Middle East History*, edited by Nikki R. Keddie and Beth Baron (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).
- Selections from Muhammad Akram Nadwi, *Al-Muhaddithat: the Women Scholars of Hadith* (Oxford: Interface Publications, 2007); students will be assigned one chapter from Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8
- Preface to Mack and Boyd, *One Women's Jihad*.

October 19

Women and Religious Education

- Watch: "The Light in Her Eyes" (in class)

Women, Charity and Patronage

- Zeinab A. Abul-Magd, "Religious Practices: Waqf," in *Encyclopedia of Women in Islamic Cultures*.
- Asma Hanif, "Women in the Hood," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JLw0BEQDrIk>.

October 26 – FALL STUDY BREAK; NO CLASS

**Book reports due – put in DropBox

- Watch and take notes for next class for discussion: "Class of 2006: Morocco's Female Religious Leaders" <http://digital.films.com/play/NDHEPD>. [no longer available]
- Watch and take notes for next class for discussion: "Koran by Heart": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ptHdmw57rzM>.

November 2

- Discuss "Koran by Heart" documentary

Women as Pastoral Leaders

- Mattson, "Can a Woman be an Imam? Debating Form and Function in Muslim Women's Leadership," <http://ingridmattson.org/article/can-a-woman-be-an-imam/>.
- Ahmed Elewa and Laury Silvers. "I am one of the People": a Survey and Analysis of Legal Arguments on Woman-Led Prayer in Islam," *Journal of Law and Religion*, v. 26, no. 1 (2010-11): 141-171.
- Amina Wadud, Cape Town Khutba from *Inside the Gender Jihad*, pp. 158-163.

Women Spiritual Guides in Sufism

- Nana Asma'u, poem: "Sufi Women"
- Margaret Smith, *Muslim Women Mystics*, 19-68.
- Camille Helminski, *Women of Sufism: A Hidden Treasure*, Introduction, pp. 56-59; 73-87.
- Joseph Hill, "'All Women are Guides': Sufi Leadership and Womanhood among Taalibe Baay in Senegal," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 40 (2010): 375-412.
- Reading from Murata, *The Tao of Islam*

November 9

Women and the Mosque

- Christopher Melchert, "Whether to Keep Women out of the Mosque: A Survey of Medieval Islamic Law".
- Jaschok and Jingjun, *The History of Women's Mosques in Chinese Islam: A mosque of their own*, pp. 68-99; 154-175.
- Explore the Side Entrance website: <http://sideentrance.tumblr.com/>. Bring notes to class.
- Watch (in class) documentary by Zarqa Nawaz, "Me and the Mosque"

November 16

Presentations

November 23

Presentations

November 30

Family, Life Cycles and Ritual Life

- Aliah Schleifer, "Respect for the Mother in Islam," from *Voices of Islam*
- Seemi Bushra Ghazi, "The Birth of Aliya Maryam," from *Voices of Islam*
- Arshe Ahmed, "On Being a Woman without Children," <http://www.altmuslimah.com/2014/11/on-being-a-woman-without-children-advice-to-mothers-and-others-part-1/>.
- Nana Asma'u, Lament for her sister
- Afeefa Syeed on the death of her son Hamza

December 7

Resistance and Religion

- Sheila Musaji, "The Abu Eesa Niamatullah Controversy," <http://theamericanmuslim.org/tam.php/features/articles/abu-eesa-niamatullah-controversy/0020147>.
- Amina Wadud, "Muslim Women's Collectives, Organizations, and Islamic Reform," Chapter 3 from *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam*
- Asiila Rasool, "Can Sharing a Husband be a Feminist Act?" http://www.altmuslimah.com/b/rsa/can_sharing_a_husband_be_a_feminist_act.
- Rabia Chaudry, "Give Muhammad a Chance," <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/splitthemoon/2014/04/give-muhammad-a-chance/>

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BOOKS FOR REVIEW

- Abbas, Shemeem Burney. *The Female Voice in Sufi Ritual: Devotional practices of Pakistan and India*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002.
- Abbott, Nabia. *Two Queens of Baghdad: Mother and Wife of Harun al-Rashid*. University of Chicago Press, 1946.
- Abdul-Ghafur, Saleemah (ed.). *Living Islam Out Loud: American Muslim Women Speak* (Boston: Beacon Press), 2005.
- Ahmed, Leila. *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011.
- Ali, Kecia: *Sexual Ethics in Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur'an, Hadith, and Jurisprudence*. Oneworld Publications. 2006.
- As-Sulami, Abu 'Abd Ar-Rahman. *Early Sufi Women: dhikr an-niswa al-muta 'abbidat as sufiyyat*. Edited and translated with introduction and notes by Rkia Elaroui Cornell. Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 1999.
- Badran, Margot. *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences*. Oneworld Publications 2008.
- Barlas, Asma. *Believing women in Islam: unreading patriarchal interpretations of the Qur'an*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002.
- Bullock, Katherine. *Rethinking Muslim women and the veil : challenging historical & modern stereotypes*. Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2002.
- Bushill-Matthews, Lucy. *Welcome to Islam: A Convert's Tale*. Continuum, 2008.
- Cadavic, Leslie. *Two Who Attained: Shaykh Ahmad al-'Alawi and Fatima al-Yashrutiyya*. Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2005.
- Ebrahimji, Maria M., and Zahra T. Suratwala. *I Speak for Myself: American Women on Being Muslim* (Ashland, Oregon: White Cloud), 2011.
- El-Azhary Sonbol, Amira (Editor). *Beyond the Exotic: Women's Histories in Islamic Societies* (Gender, Culture & Politics in the Middle East S.) Syracuse University Press. 2005.
- Eve and Adam: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender*. Eds. Kristen E. Kvam Linda Scheearing and Valerie Ziegler. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999.
- Gehrke-White, Donna. *The Face Behind the Veil: the Extraordinary Lives of Muslim Women in America*. New York: Citadel Press, 2006.
- Grewal, Zareena. *Islam is a Foreign Country: American Muslims and the Global Crisis of Authority*. New York University Press, 2014. [please focus on women in this study]
- Hammer, Julianne. *American Muslim Women, Religious Authority and Activism*. University of Texas Press, 2012.
- Heath, Jennifer. *The Scimitar and the Veil: Extraordinary women of Islam*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2004.
- Helminski, Camille Adams. *Women of Sufism: a hidden treasure*. Boston: Shambhala, 2003.
- Jaschok, Maria and Shui Jingjun. *The History of Women's Mosques in Chinese Islam: a mosque of their own*. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000.
- Kahf, Mohja. *Western Representations of Muslim Women: from termagant to odalisque*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999.
- Mack, Beverly B. *Muslim Women Sing: Hausa Popular Song*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004.
- Mack, Beverly B. and Jean Boyd. *One Woman's Jihad: Nana Asma'u, Scholar and Scribe*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000.
- Mahmood, Saba. *Politics of Piety: the Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton University Press, 2004.
- Mernissi, Fatima. *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*. University of Minnesota Press, 1997.
- Mir, Shabana. *Muslim American Women on Campus: Undergraduate Social Life and Identity*. University of North Carolina Press, 2014.
- Murata, Sachiko. *The Tao of Islam: a sourcebook on gender relationships in Islamic thought*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992.
- Nawaz, Zarqa. *Laughing All the Way to the Mosque*. Toronto: Harper Perennial, 2014.
- Raudvere, Catharina. *The Book and the Roses: Sufi Women, Visibility and Zikr in Contemporary Istanbul*. I.B. Taurus, 2003.
- Schleifer, Aliah. *Mary: Blessed Virgin of Islam*. Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 1998.
- Smith, Margaret. *Muslim Women Mystics: the life and work of Rabi'a and other women mystics in Islam*. Oneworld, 2000.

- Sonbol, Amira El Azhary. *The Creation of a medical profession in Egypt, 1800-1922*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1991.
- Stowasser, Barbara Freyer. *Women in the Qur'an: traditions and interpretation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Thanvi, Ashraf 'Ali. *Perfecting Women: Maulana Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi's Bihishti zewar: a partial translation with commentary* by Barbara Daly Metcalf. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.
- Wadud, Amina. *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, Second Edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Wilson, G. Willow. *The Butterfly Mosque: A Young American Woman's Journey to Love and Islam. Women, the Family and Divorce Laws in Islamic History (Contemporary Issues in the Middle East)*. Ed. by Amira El Azhary Sonbol. Syracuse University Press, 1996.

**Non-Exhaustive List of Women for In-Class Presentations
(Confirm selection with instructor)**

Pre-Modern:

- ❖ A lesser-known but important Companion such as Al-Shifa' Layla bint Abdullah
- ❖ Any 2nd or 3rd generation Muslim woman (i.e., a "Successor" or a "Successor to the Successors"), such as Asma bint Talha
- ❖ Sufi Shaykha or ascetic, such as Rabia al-Adawiyya of Basra
- ❖ "Lady" Nafisa bint Hassan
- ❖ Hadith scholar, legal scholar or preacher of the classical period such as Fatima al-Samarqandiyya
- ❖ Nana Asma'u of the West African Sokoto caliphate
- ❖ Fatima al-Fihriyya or other woman patron of religious institutions

Modern:

- ❖ Fatima al-Yashrutiyya, Sufi teacher of Palestine
- ❖ Munira al-Qubaysi, Syrian and global spiritual leader
- ❖ Bint al-Shati', Egyptian scholar of the Qur'an
- ❖ Mukhtar Mai, activist of Pakistan
- ❖ Malala Yousafzai, activist of Pakistan
- ❖ Amina Wadud, religious scholar of the USA
- ❖ Mohja Kahf, poet and author of USA and Syria
- ❖ Tawwakul Karman, human rights activist of Yemen
- ❖ Amina Rasul-Bernardo, peace activist of the Philippines
- ❖ Kadriye Avcı Erdemli, Former Fmr. Deputy Mufti of Turkey
- ❖ Tayyibah Taylor, Founder and Publisher of Azizah Magazine
- ❖ Anse Tamara Gray, Religious Scholar, Founder and Director of Rabata
- ❖ Many other women can be found on <http://www.wisemuslimwomen.org/>