

Course: Keys to Reading Ibn ‘Arabī
Semester: February 2021
Instructor: Dr. Saliha Farid Abdelkhalek

Course description

This course is designed to introduce students to Ibn ‘Arabī, the Andalusian Muslim mystic of the 12th/13th century (1165-1240), who is considered the Grand Sheikh of the living Sufi tradition, and author of the possibly, largest Muslim Esoteric Encyclopaedia *al-Futūḥat al-Makkīya (The Meccan Openings)*. Anyone who comes in contact with the writings of Ibn ‘Arabī’, will soon discover the difficulty involved in reading and deciphering them; how Illusive, profound and mysterious they are. Thus, understanding the framework and context in which Ibn ‘Arabī wrote, the backdrop of the religious tradition and the philosophical concepts and language that were inherited and at times, purposefully employed, make his texts much more accessible to students. Hence, this course entitled “Keys to Reading Ibn ‘Arabī”, combines central themes in Sufism and philosophy, designed to help students navigate Ibn ‘Arabī’s primary texts and access some layer of meaning, paving the dip into the “ocean without a shore”.

Suggested topics

Marginalized epistemologies: (3 weeks)

- a) The Islamic Intellectual Tradition
Reading:
Introduction: The Intellectual Tradition in Islam (The Tao of Islam- Murata, p.1)
Revelation, Intellect and Reason in the Quran (Sufi Essays- Nasr, pp- 52-56)
- b) Knowledge by presence vs. (absolute) constructivism
- c) The concept and language- can there be something we can’t speak about? (apophasis)
- d) Mystical experience: Can I be nothing?
Reading:
Mysticism versus Philosophy pp.59-74 (Ibn al-Arabi’s Barzakh- Salman Bashier)
- e) Embodied knowledge – ritual as a way of knowing and embodying knowledge
- f) Discursive vs. non-discursive thinking
Reading:
Sections: Mistrust in thinking, Elimination of Discursive thinking, The A-thinking thinking (Towards a Philosophy of Zen Buddhism Izutsu pp.147-160)
- g) Understanding Divine Duality vs. Cartesian Duality:
Reading:
Divine Duality, p. 49-76 (The Tao of Islam- Murata)
- h) Eastern and western phenomenology and existentialism

Readings on Neoplatonism (2 weeks):

- a) “Matter as Cosmic Instrument” p.31(Theurgy and the Soul- Shaw)
- b) “Theurgy as Demiurgy” p. 50 (Theurgy and the Soul- Shaw)
- c) “The Paradox of Embodiment” p.110 (Theurgy and the Soul- Shaw)
- d) “Ritual and the Human Hierarchy” p.162 (Theurgy and the Soul- Shaw)

- e) “Ritual as Cosmogony” p.173 (Theurgy and the Soul- Shaw)

Sufism (of Ibn ‘Arabi): The Framework (3 weeks)

- a) What is Sufism?

Reading:

(The Shambala Guide to Sufism- Ernst, pp. 1-31)

Seventh-century Sufism and the School of Ibn ‘Arabi (Sufi Essays, Nasr, pp.97-103)

- b) The Cosmic Order

Reading:

The three realities p.23-45 (The Tao of Islam- Murata)

- c) Fanā and baqā

- d) Divine Love

- e) The heart (as intellect)

Reading:

The Heart (The Tao of Islam, p.289-316)

The Heart as a Subtile Organ, The Science of the Heart pp. 221-245 (Alone with the Alone- Corbin)

- f) Master-Disciple Relationship and the Chain (Sheikh-Mureed-Silsila)

Reading:

The Sufis Orders 120-146 (The Shambala Guide to Sufism- Ernst)

- g) Servitude/servanthood

- h) The Divine Names

Reading:

The Names of God, Meditation, and Mystical Experience pp.81-119 (The Shambala Guide to Sufism- Ernst)

- i) The perfect human being

Reading:

The Perfect Man pp.113-128 (Ibn al-Arabi’s Barzakh- Bashier)

- j) God, the human being and the world

Reading:

The Creation as Theophany p.184 (Alone with the Alone- Corbin)

The two dimensions of Beings p. 207(Alone with the Alone- Corbin)

- k) Correspondence theory

Reading:

Cosmic Correspondence (Murata- The Tao of Islam, p. 14)

Ibn ‘Arabi: The Literalist, Traditionalist, Controversialist (4 weeks)

- l) Introduction to Ibn Arabi

Reading:

Ibn ‘Arabi, his life and work, p. 29-49 (The Sufis of Andalusia)

- m) The Merciful approach – forgiving Pharaoh?

- n) Waḥdat al wujūd – pantheism?

- o) gradation of being— does a shadow really exist?

- p) Literalist approach – traditionalist or blasphemous?

- q) Servanthood, the perfect human being, the feminine and masculine

- r) Sharia as onto-cosmic (Neoplatonic order)

- s) Ritual as the vehicle and embodiment of divine manifestation (Neoplatonic theurgy)

