

Summer Intensive Course—GTA 2016

Course Descriptions

Community Building

Instructor: Husayn El-Mekki

Duration: 7 Sessions

Introduction: Community building is a comprehensive effort which requires guidance in understanding the theoretical aspects of community building and how they translate into practice. Considering that Islam is a holistic way of life and applicable to all segments of humanity irrespective of outward differences, how is the practice of community building to be measured and implemented for those living in Canada or the West in general? Given its importance and relevance, it has undoubtedly been approached differently by different individuals. A comparison of these approaches highlights the difference between the proper Islamic perspective of community building and other forms that have been utilized in the West.

This course will examine : (1) the process/method by which a community should be cultivated (organic, structured, etc.), (2) the importance of knowledge/*ma'rifah* in community building, (3) the ways of strengthening the bond between the community members, (4) examples of community building in the *sīrah* of the Prophet and the A'immah, (5) verses of Qur'ān and *ahādīth* related to the idea of community building, etc. especial as they relate to us in the place and era in which we live.

Contemporary Issues in Theology: Religious Pluralism

Instructor: Shuja Ali Mirza

Duration: 7 Sessions

Introduction: With the advent of modernity and the accompanying advances in technology—especially in the means of communication and travel—the traditional and “natural” barriers that existed between different religious communities and civilizations and that allowed them to thrive in a relatively insular fashion all but disappeared. Hence the exposure of even the average followers of any one religion to the beliefs and practices of other religions became commonplace. This caused a dilemma, as it is commonly known that religious life requires committed actions based on firm faith in the doctrines of the religion at hand and every religion calls its adherents towards the acquisition of absolute certainty with regards to the truths that it espouses. Hence the coexistence of parallel “versions” of truth caused much confusion. In consequence, ideas were put forth that attempted to account for the multiplicity of religions and the variety of religious experience. Some of these ideas involved reducing the “absolute” nature of religion. They spoke of religions in a relative fashion and said that the plurality of religions imply that no one religion is true. Such an approach was seen to be the “kiss of death” to the traditional self-conceptualisation of religion. These modern ideas were generally grouped under the label of *Religious Pluralism*. Religious Pluralism vigorously proffered a framework and claimed to offer a rationally sound and “peaceful” solution to the problem at hand. But the fact remains that most religious people who intuitively understand the importance of religion, also understand the danger inherent in Religious Pluralism but are unable to respond to it in an intelligent manner. Such a response must include the correct explanation of religious diversity from the standpoint of Islam, in particular the mystical tradition of Islam, and must be clearly enunciated so as to provide the seekers of truth in this age of confusion with a more comprehensive and applicable solution to the problem.

Practical Approach to Spirituality

Instructor: Agha Mehdi Ali

Duration: 5 Sessions

Introduction: The spiritual journey in Islam has both a theoretical and a practical component. In most places in Islamic literature, the theoretical component is studied and discussed while the practical component has remained largely ignored. In this course, we will attempt to shed light on the practical component of the spiritual journey by focussing on one of the greatest contemporary spiritual wayfarers—Allamah Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabātabā'ī. By studying passages from *Mihr-e Tābān (Shining Sun)*, the students will be given more direct and tangible insights into spiritual wayfaring.

Islamic Morality

Instructor: Sayyid Asad Jafri

Duration: 2 Sessions

Introduction:

“By the soul and Him who fashioned it, and inspired it with [discernment between] its virtues and vices: one who purifies it is felicitous, and one who betrays it fails.” (91:7-10)

In so far as the human being has a soul, the question of ethics and morality pertains to him. Islamic morality, as a science, deals with how to prevent certain vices from entering the soul and how to cultivate certain virtues within it. As such, it contains both a theoretical component as well as a practical dimension. Moreover, since Islamic morality is based on perennial principles, the virtues and vices that it identifies are also constant. In this class, we will examine some of the issues that pertain to the Islamic moral system.

An Overview of ‘Ilm al-Ḥadīth

Instructor: Sayyid Ali Imran Naqvi

Duration: 7 Sessions

Introduction: One of the most significant bodies of work within the vast sea of Islamic disciplines is *ḥadīth* literature. The majority of Muslims since the rise of Islam, have relied heavily on *ḥadīth* to gain religious knowledge pertaining to different aspects of their lives, whether it be in theology, jurisprudence or ethics. These sessions will introduce students to a brief development of *ḥadīth* sciences, a glance over the main Shi'a and Sunni works, different approaches taken towards understanding *ahadīth*, a rudimentary exposure to some important discussions within the *ḥadīth* sciences, and a brief critique of the different methodologies employed by Orientalists towards this science.

Topics will include: The history of its development and compilation; major books of *ḥadīth*; understanding the Akhbārī and Uṣūlī views; the sciences of Rijāl and Dirāyah; Fiqh al-Ḥadīth - methodology and case studies; and the case of Orientalists and Ḥadīth studies.

From Muslim to Mu'min: Thinking Straight

Instructor: Sayyid Hasan Ali Rizvi

Duration: 7 Sessions

Introduction: The Holy Qur'ān and the *ma'sūmīn* ('a) have highlighted the importance of the 'aql in our journey towards Allah, but how much value have we actually placed on it? Terms such as 'rational', 'logical', 'obvious', and 'common sense' are thrown around carelessly by those wishing to engage in ideological discussions without really considering the true meaning behind them. Many of us have come to learn and understand religion through our parents and communities. When our conception of religion is challenged by others or even when we raise questions regarding previously agreed-upon notions, we are at a loss for words, unable to think critically, and offer a satisfying and viable answer. In some cases, our very Muslim identity becomes compromised. This course will attempt to present the logical and rational methodology which our 'ulamā have utilized in order to foster a better understanding of religion on an intellectual basis.

Topics will include: Muslim identity in the West, understanding and combating underlying epistemological issues, establishing logical foundations for thinking, applying rational thinking to the principles of the faith (*uṣūl al-dīn*), and answering selected problems and issues related to these principles.

The Metahistorical History of the Enduring Ma'ṣūm

Instructor: Navid Charoosseh

Duration: 5 Sessions

Introduction:

“Verily, in the Messenger of Allah you have a good example for whosoever hopes for God and the Last Day, and remembers God much.” (33:21)

The Qur'ān is filled with examples and reminders of people who have lived in the past and who serve as imitable models for us. As Muslims, the best examples we have are the lives of the *ma'ṣūmīn*. The question is, how should we study their lives?

In his book, *Society and History*, Shahīd Muṭahharī looks at three different ways of examining history. The first is transmitted history wherein one examines specific details of people or events that occurred in the past. The second is analytical history where one attempts to uncover the factors and causes of events that occurred in the past with the hope of discovering more universal “laws” regarding those events. Finally, there is the philosophy of history that looks at history in general and attempts to uncover the very principles that govern its development.

All three ways of examining history are useful and the best approach is to combine them under one unified study. This is especially true when studying the lives of the Ahl al-bayt, for not only do we have traditions that compare them to a single light, but in so far as they themselves had a vision that was beyond the physical and temporal, their actions will necessarily stem from this metahistorical perspective. In other words, the best way to understand the *ma'ṣūmīn* ('a) is to consider them as a single entity—i.e., a single *ma'ṣūm*—whose actions throughout the differing phases of history all stem from a common vision, purpose, and goal.

In this class, we will make the argument that the best way to examine and appreciate the history of the Ahl al-Bayt is to view them as a single entity with a common goal. Through numerous examples, we will illustrate how their apparently “differing” stances at various times were all connected under a unified vision.

A Day in the Life of an Islamic Jurist

Instructor: Sayyid Hasan Naqvi

Duration: 6 Sessions

Introduction: Many of us know that the Qur'ān, the *aḥādīth*, and the *'aql* are among the most important sources that a *faqīh* (jurist) utilizes in order to derive Islamic laws. But have you ever wondered what tools and methods he uses to help him in this process? This course will familiarize you with one of the most important and fundamental sciences in respect to Islamic Law: *Uṣūl al-Fiqh* or The Principles of Jurisprudence. It was developed during the time of the greater occultation and is still a vibrant and dynamic science even today.

In this course, we will explore some of the different methods of how the science of *Uṣūl* is applied to the sources of Islamic Law in order to help the jurist in issuing verdicts for his followers to abide by. We will also become acquainted with some of the great personalities that have influenced the development of this important science.

An Overview of Ilm Al-Fiqh as well as Practical Laws on Some Contemporary Issues

Instructor: Muhammad Mahdi Kassamali

Duration: 3 Sessions

Introduction: This course intends to give an introduction to the science of *fiqh* within the Shi'a school of thought. Questions such as the following will be addressed: What is the purpose of the science of *fiqh*? How does this differ from the Science of *uṣūl al-fiqh*? How does a *faqīh* (jurist) carry out his responsibility? What are some of the preliminary sciences he must master? How did *'ilm al-fiqh* develop from the time of the Imams (a) until the current age? A brief overview of the chapters of *fiqh* will also be presented.

In addition to the above, some of the practical responsibilities of a believer with regards to the following areas will be discussed according to the verdicts of Ayatullah Sistani and Ayatullah Khamenei: taqlīd, food issues in the West, music, and mixed gatherings.
