

An Introduction to Classical Study of the Qurʾān

Leo Baeck College 2008-2009

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The aim of the course is to introduce rabbis, rabbinical students and other students of Jewish studies to the vast body of classical Islamic scholarship which is marshalled in traditional Muslim interpretation of the Qurʾān, as God's sacred Scripture and as a source for all aspects of Islamic doctrine, morality, law and interreligious relations. There is a strong focus on Islamic texts relating to Jewish-Muslim relations and Jewish influences on the Qurʾān and early Islam, and one principal aim of the course is to provide Jewish studies and rabbinical students with the tools to engage in text-based dialogue with Muslims around issues concerning relations between the two communities.

This course is taught in modules consisting of introductory lectures and interactive group text studies. All Qurʾānic texts, *ḥadīth* and classical commentaries are translated from the original Arabic by myself. All materials are provided, and typically at the end of each session the study texts for the next session are provided for advance reading. As a mature research environment, the sessions are encouraged as being a shared group inquiry together, where students learn from questioning, dialectic discussion and collegial disagreement.

The aim is to create a safe environment where tough questions may be asked by students around the implications of Qurʾānic interpretation for Jewish-Muslim relations and also controversial issues. Every effort is made to respect and accommodate the *halakhic* and religious observance of Orthodox students and a light kosher lunch is also provided.

“Read in the Name of Your Lord”: How Does Classical Islamic Scholarship Interpret the Qurʾān?

Tuesday 4 November 2008 12.00-1.00pm – Lecture with Powerpoint notes

At the end of this session students will:

- Be introduced to the importance for rabbis, rabbinical students and Jewish students of other disciplines of a knowledge of the Qurʾān and its interpretation, and Jewish-Muslim relations
- Have been familiarised with the structure, compilation, recension and reception of the Qurʾānic text
- Have been introduced to the key hermeneutical concepts of *tafsīr bi-l-maʿthūr*, *tafsīr bi-l-raʾy*, and the role of Prophetic *ḥadīth* as the primary instrument of exegesis in *ʿusul al-fiqh*
- Differing approaches to the status of the Qurʾān and the role of reason and religious authority in scriptural interpretation – both Sunni, Muʿtazilite and Shiʿite *tafsīr*
- A brief history of a few of the most prominent authors of classical *tafsīr* literature and founders of the schools of Qurʾānic interpretation

***“We Believe in that which was Sent Down to Us and that which was Sent Down to You, and Our God and Your God are One”:* Continuity and Contrast with the People of the Book**

Tuesday 18 November 2008 12.00-1.00pm – Brief Introductory Lecture with Powerpoint notes and Group Text Study

At the end of this session students will:

- Have been introduced to the methodology and typical format of a Qurʾānic exegesis class in a Sunni Islamic academic institution – grammatical and philological analysis, *qiyās* or analogical interpretation through apposition with other Qurʾānic verses, *tafsīr* interpretation through oral tradition of *ḥadīth*, and derivation of *aḥkām* and other legal rulings
- Be familiarised with the appearance and format of a typical medieval *tafsīr* in Islamic scholarship
- Be introduced to Qurʾānic discourse on the continuity of monotheistic belief with the Jewish prophets, Islam’s self-definition as the Abrahamic dispensation, and the Qurʾānic portrayal of the relationship between the new Muslim *umma* and extant Jewish and Christian communities
- Undertake a group text study of Qurʾānic texts together with classical commentaries and parallel *ḥadīth* concerning Islam’s continuity and contrast with Judaism and relationship with the Jewish prophets

***“We Did Reveal the Torah Wherein there is Guidance and Light”:* Biblical and Midrashic Narratives in the Qurʾān**

Tuesday 25 November 2008 12.00-1.00pm – Brief Introductory Lecture with Powerpoint notes and Group Text Study

At the end of this session students will:

- Have been introduced to the role of Jewish influences in the formative period of Islam and the contact of the Prophet and early Islam with Jewish communities in the Hijaz
- Explore the status of the foregoing revealed scriptures including the Torah and Psalms according to the Qurʾān, and the continuity of Jewish rabbinical tradition with God’s Revelation
- Have been introduced to the concept of *israʿīliyyāt* and Jewish discourse as a determinant in Islamic interpretation of the Qurʾān
- Undertake a group text study of Qurʾānic texts together with classical commentaries and parallel *ḥadīth* of Biblical and Midrashic narratives which are found in the Qurʾān – for example, the narratives on Joseph and Potiphar, and Abraham and the idols

“Enjoining What is Right and Forbidding What is Wrong”: God’s Law, Justice and Jihād in Qur’ānic Exegesis

Tuesday 2 December 2008 12.00-1.00pm – Brief Introductory Lecture with Powerpoint notes and Group Text Study

At the end of this session students will:

- Be introduced to the role of the Qur’ān as a primary source of Islamic law
- Be familiarised with the difference between *sharī‘a* and *fiqh*, the relationship between Qur’ānic exegesis and sacred law, and the setting out by *al-Shāfi‘ī* of the canons of *‘usūl al-fiqh*
- Be introduced to the primary schools of Sunni Islamic law, with reference also to Shi‘ite schools
- Be introduced by way of example, to the Qur’ānic punishments or *ḥadd* in Islamic law, and their relation to *qiṣaṣ* or Qur’ānic tort for murder, and *ta‘zīr* or discretionary punishment
- Be introduced by way of example, to the place of *jihād* in Islam as part of a juridical imperative to ‘enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong’, and the separation of *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām*
- Undertake a group text study of Qur’ānic texts together with classical commentaries and parallel *ḥadīth* of texts on the *lex talionis* in the Qur’ān and a passage on *jihād* and *sayr*

“You Will Find the Strongest of People in Enmity to the Believers the Jews”: The Determinants of Anti-Semitism in Islamic Scripture and Tradition

Tuesday 9 December 2008 12.00-1.00pm – Brief Introductory Lecture with Powerpoint notes and Group Text Study

At the end of this session students will:

- Be introduced to the representation of Jews and Judaism in the Qur’ān, the positive representations of God’s Chosen People together with contrasting ambivalent hostility toward Jews in other passages
- Be familiarised with the historical context for the evolving relationships and conflicts between the nascent Islamic community and the Jewish tribes in Medina
- Be introduced to exegetical *ḥadīth* literature which has widely been used as a basis for anti-Jewish and anti-semitic discourse in the Islamic world
- Continuing the discussion on *jihād* in the previous session, be introduced to the role of *jihād* in the historical persecution of Jewish people

- Undertake a group text study of Qurʾānic texts together with classical commentaries and parallel *ḥadīth* of texts on the theme of Jews and Judaism in the Qurʾān

“And We Said After That to the Children of Israel, ‘Settle the Land’”: Is There a Qurʾānic Mandate for Eretz Israel?

Tuesday 16 December 2008 12.00-1.00pm – Brief Introductory Lecture with Powerpoint notes and Group Text Study

At the end of this session students will:

- Be introduced to the status in classical Qurʾānic commentary of the Land of Israel-Palestine and Jerusalem, and the corresponding status accorded to the Holy Land in modern Islamic exegesis and political theology
- Undertake a group text study of Qurʾānic texts together with classical commentaries and parallel *ḥadīth* of texts on the theme of the Holy Land and Jewish covenant with the Land in the Qurʾān
- In this session, students will be encouraged to apply the skills acquired in the previous sessions to discuss and interpret the Islamic texts on Eretz Israel from varying and opposing viewpoints

“There Are in Joseph and His Brothers Signs for those who Question”:
Qurʾānic Narratives from the Sūra of Joseph

Tuesday 17 February 2009 12.00-1.00pm – Brief Introductory Lecture with Powerpoint notes and Group Text Study

In this session students will:

- Undertake a group text study of Qurʾānic texts together with classical commentaries and parallel *ḥadīth* of passages from *Sūrat Yūsuf*

“And When We Took Your Covenant and Raised Above You the Mount”:
Qurʾānic Exodus Narratives

Tuesday 24 February 2009 12.00-1.00pm – Brief Introductory Lecture with Powerpoint notes and Group Text Study

In this session students will:

- Undertake a group text study of Qurʾānic texts together with classical commentaries and parallel *ḥadīth* of selected Exodus narrative passages in the Qurʾān

“God is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth”:
Mystical and Esoteric Readings of the Qurʾān

Tuesday 3 March 2009 12.00-1.00pm – Brief Introductory Lecture with Powerpoint notes and Group Text Study

In this session students will:

- Undertake a group text study of Qur'ānic texts together with classical commentaries and parallel *ḥadīth* of texts of Sufi, Shi'ite and other mystical approaches to interpretation of the Qur'ān

***“And Among His Signs are that He Created Spouses from Among Yourselves”:* Marriage Law in the Qur'ān**

Tuesday 24 March 2009 12.00-1.00pm – Brief Introductory Lecture with Powerpoint notes and Group Text Study

In this session students will:

- Undertake a group text study of Qur'ānic texts together with classical commentaries and parallel *ḥadīth* and legal texts on the theme of Marriage Law in the Qur'ān

***“But if they are Resolved Upon Divorce, God is Hearing, All-knowing”:* Divorce Law in the Qur'ān**

Tuesday 31 March 2009 12.00-1.00pm – Brief Introductory Lecture with Powerpoint notes and Group Text Study

In this session students will:

- Undertake a group text study of Qur'ānic texts together with classical commentaries and parallel *ḥadīth* and legal texts on the theme of Divorce Law in the Qur'ān

لَا عِلْمَ لَنَا إِلَّا مَا عَلَّمْتَنَا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ

‘We have no knowledge except what You have taught us; truly are You the Knowledgeable, the Wise’ (*Qur'ān* 2:32)

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