

Religious Studies Lecture 2015

Guest Speaker Reza Shah-Kazemi

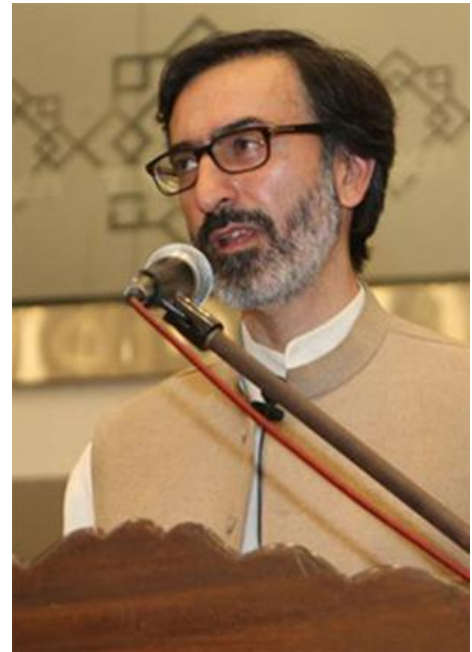
Research Fellow with the Department of Academic Research
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Managing Editor of *Encyclopaedia Islamica*

Reza Shah-Kazemi is the founding editor of *The Islamic World Report* and is currently a Research Associate at the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London, England (Department of Academic Research and Publications). He is Managing Editor of the *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, the English translation and edition of the on-going multi-volume *Persian Great Islamic Encyclopaedia (Da'irat al-Ma'arif-i Buzurg-i Islami)*.

Dr Shah-Kazemi received degrees in International Relations and Politics at Sussex and Exeter University before receiving his doctorate in Comparative Religion from the University of Kent in 1994. He later acted as a consultant to the Institute for Policy Research in Kuala Lumpur.

Shah-Kazemi writes on comparative mysticism, Islamic Studies, Sufism, and Shi'ism. He is currently working on a volume of essays entitled: *The Same God? Essays on Muslim-Christian Understanding*. He is also writing a biography—*Imam Ali: The Triumph of Sanctity: Ali b. Abi Talib*. His extensive bibliography includes, among others, *The Sacred Foundations of Justice in Islam* (2007) and *Paths to Transcendence: Shankara, Ibn 'Arabi, and Meister Eckhart on Transcendent Spiritual Realization* (2008).



Monday, April 6, 2015

Lecture: 6:30 pm, Law School Auditorium

**“From Tolerance to Reverence: Spirituality and
Universality in Islam”**

Tuesday April 7, 2015

Lecture: 6:00 pm, Gambrell Hall Auditorium

"Muslim Reflections on the Crucifixion"

This event co-sponsored by:

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Monday Evening Lecture:

“From Tolerance to Reverence: Spirituality and Universality in Islam”

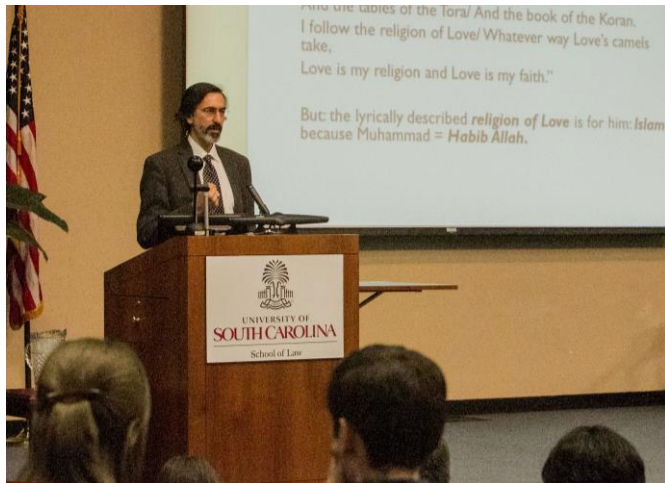
After opening remarks from Dr. James Cutsinger, Chair of the Department of Religious Studies, and Mr. Chaudhry Sadiq of the Peace and Integration Council of North America, Dr. Reza Shah-Kazemi addressed the audience. Beginning with such diverse writers as Bernard Lewis, John Locke, and Ali Hujwiri, he brought out the historical basis of tolerance in Islam rooted squarely, as Lewis notes, in Islamic law itself.



Pointing out that tolerance is commonly conceived as a “reluctant acceptance, a regrettable necessity of putting up with the Other,” Shah-Kazemi noted that with spiritual perspectives we can move beyond mere tolerance based on the idea of an ethical norm to a genuinely transforming spiritual quality of universality. The spirit and spirituality of Islam are the empowering factors for the tolerance, inclusivism, and respect for diversity that is found at the heart of the Qur’an itself. Sufism, he said, though not the whole of Islamic spirituality is where the spiritual values of the Islamic tradition are most clearly expressed and most deeply fathomed.



That spirit of Islam, Shah-Kazemi explained, is characterized by the universal message of the noble Qur’an along with the moral and spiritual radiance of the soul of the Prophet. The morality and ethics of the message of the Qur’an are impossible without the virtue of spiritual



principles being realized at the same time. Kindness and charity, in even the smallest things, are prerequisites for fulfilment of morality and ethics. Upholding outward forms of religion and law without these virtues is undermining the religion and the law.

Ibn Arabi, one of the great philosophers of Islam, says that the heart suffused by the spirit of Islam, the religion of Love, embraces all religious forms. In his *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq*, one of the great classics of Sufism, Ibn Arabi famously

wrote, "I follow the religion of Love/ Whatever way Love's camels take/ Love is my religion and Love is my faith."



Go to the Qur'an, Shah-Kazemi said, with the correct perspective of love, and all religions become present. The more deeply you go into the specificity of Islam, the more unavoidable becomes universality. For those who know the Qur'an as the guide for our attitude toward the religious Other, the answer to the basic question, based on the Qur'an, opens up unavoidably into tolerance and universality. Exclusivity and intolerance become clearly seen as deviations from the spirit of the Qur'anic discourse.

Following the lecture, the audience enjoyed the reception with refreshments and visiting with the speakers and one another

