**HIS 111 Discussion 2: Vedism, Buddhism, and Hinduism in Indian society**

Directions:

* Read the introduction and reading questions for each document before you read the document itself.
* Read the following documents carefully with a critical thinking mindset. The reading questions will help you analyze their content. I recommend printing out the file and either underlining important phrases, or writing margin notes, or taking notes about parts of the reading that relate to the reading questions. Have a conversation with the document. You may need to read it multiple times for it to start to make sense to you.
* For the on-campus class, write down your responses to the reading questions and bring them to class the day of the discussion
* For the online class, go to discussion 2 in the discussion tool on D2L and respond to the prompt there.
* Again, for the online class, once other students have answered the initial prompt on D2L, respond to at least two of their posts, first addressing any discussion leader question if one has been posted.

***Source 1*** – The **Bhagavad Gita** is a section of an enormous epic poem known as the Mahabarata, that records the conflict between two branches of a family. In this section, Arjuna, a Kshatriya warrior, is reluctant to engage in a great battle where he will have to kill members of his own extended family. His charioteer Lord Krishna, who is actually a version of the god Vishnu, calms him by explaining the importance of carrying out his sacred duty, or his dharma.

Reading questions about source 1:

1. How does this source address social class relationships?
2. How does it define the relationship between physical action in the world and spiritual fulfillment?
3. How does it define dharma, and what is the importance of fulfilling one’s dharma?

The Bhagavad Gita (The Song of the Lord) Excerpt from the Mahabharata

At sunrise the next day, the armies of the Kurus and the Pandavas completed all their arrangements. The Eleventh Division of the Kuru army stood in advance of all others. At the head of the troops stood Bhisma. On one side were eleven splendid divisions of the Pandava army, protected by the foremost of men. The two facing armies looked like two mighty oceans agitated by fearful ocean waves. Sanjaya reported to Dhrtarashtra, “When placed in battle array, the two armies full of elephants, chariots, and horses looked like two woods in blossom. Both of them seemed as if they could conquer the very heavens. Both of them were commanded by excellent men. The Kaurava armies stood facing the west while the Pandavas stood facing the east-all ready for battle.”

Then Arjuna, whose flag bore the figure of an ape, looked at the Kauravas drawn up in battle array. As the fighting was about to begin, he took up his bow and said to Krishna, “I wish to see my opponents who are eager for battle and whom I have to fight in the great struggle. Station my chariot, O Krishna, between the two armies!” As requested by Arjuna, Krishna drove the chariot to a position between the two armies. Arjuna saw his closest kinsmen, related to him as father or grandfather, uncle or brother, son or grandson, teacher as well as companion and friend on both sides. Overcome by this sight, he said in sorrow and compassion, “O Krishna, when I see my own people ready to fight and eager for battle, my limbs shudder, my mouth is dry, my body shivers, and my hair stands on end. Furthermore, I see evil portents, and I can see no good in killing my own kinsmen. It is not right and proper that we should kill our own kith and kin, the Kauravas. How can we be happy if we slay our own people?” Having said these words, Arjuna threw away his boy and arrows, and sat down sorrowfully on the seat of his chariot.

When he observed that Arjuna was overcome with compassion and that tears were welling up in his eyes, Krishna said these words to him who was thus troubled and dejected, “O Arjuna why have you become so depressed in this critical hour? Such dejections are unknown to noble men; it does not lead to the heavenly heights, and on earth it can only cause disgrace. Do not yield to cowardice, for it is not worthy of you. Cast away this faintness of hear and arise.”

Arjuna said, “O Krishna, how can I strike with my arrows people like grandsire Bhishma and teacher Drona, who are worthy of my respect? After such reflection, he finally told Krishna, “I will not fight.”

Krishna smiled at Arjuna, so troubled in mind and dejected in spirit, and said,

“The wise grieve neither for the living nor for the dead. There was never a time you or I did not exist, nor shall we ever cease to exist in the future. The Spirit is neither born nor does it die; it is not destroyed when the body is destroyed. After the death of the body, the Spirit is reborn in a new body until Self-Realization is attained. Death is certain for the one who is born, and birth is certain for the one who dies. Therefore, you should not lament over the inevitable but pray for Self-Realization that you may be at peace.

Simply do your duty to the best of your ability without becoming discouraged by the thought of the outcome, which may be success or failure, loss or victory. You have control over your actions, but no control or claim over the result. Fear of failure, from being emotionally attached to the fruit of work, is the greatest impediment to success because it disturbs the equanimity of the mind. A farmer is responsible for working his land, yet has no control over the harvest. But if he does not work his land, he cannot expect a harvest! By doing your duty, you will not incur Karmic bondage.

Seek this knowledge, this discipline, Arjuna. There are many paths to Me, to enlightenment and freedom . . .

One is truly enlightened who:

— Does all work as an offering to God, abandoning attachment to the result

— Enjoys sensual pleasure with mind and senses under control

— Sees one and the same Spirit in all beings, looks at a learned person, an outcast, or an animal, with equal eye, and can feel the pain and pleasure of others as one's own

— Neither rejoices on obtaining what is pleasant, nor grieves on obtaining the unpleasant, and is tranquil and equanimous in pleasure and pain, in fulfillment and disappointment, in honor and disgrace

— Finds happiness in the Supreme Being, rejoices the Supreme Being within, is illuminated by Self-Knowledge and remains ever steadfast with the Supreme Self

— Acts beyond personal selfish motives

— Has neither attachment nor aversion for anything

— Has discovered the joy of spiritual knowledge, and whose mind is in union with God.

Such a person is not bound by Karma though engaged in work, maintains equanimity whatever occurs, and attains eternal bliss.

Therefore, let your mind be ever absorbed in Me, O Arjuna, remain unattached to the outcome of your actions, and go forth to do your duty, knowing the Spirit is deathless and eternal.

“My bewilderment is gone,” said Arjuna. “By your grace, O Krishna, I have been made to realize my true duties. My doubts have been dispelled and I stand ready to do your bidding.

***Source 2*** – The **Laws of Manu**, or the Manusmrti or Manava-dharmasastra, are a legal text that was written somewhere between 200 BCE and 300 CE. They are probably based upon earlier Vedic teachings, but they reflect the rise of patriarchy during that period, versus the earlier centuries of Indian society (1500 – 500 BCE) which appear to have lent more independence and rights to women. They also communicate specific expectations for people in various social classes.

Questions to consider about source 2:

1. How does the source address social class and gender relationships? What can it reveal about Indian society at that time?

**The Laws of Manu (excerpt)**

I.3. On account of his pre-eminence, on account of the superiority of his origin, on account of his observance of particular restrictive rules, and on account of his particular sanctification, the brahmin is the lord of all castes.

I.4. The brahmin, the kshatriya, and the vaisya castes are the twice-born ones, but the fourth, the sudra, has one birth only. . . .

I.31. But for the sake of the prosperity of the worlds, [the Creator] caused the brahmin, the kshatriya, the vaisya, and the sudra to proceed from his mouth, his arms, his thighs, and his feet.

I.87. But in order to protect this universe He, the most resplendent one, assigned separate duties and occupations to those who sprang from his mouth, arms, thighs, and feet.

X.5. In all castes those children only which are begotten in the direct order on wedded wives, equal in caste and married as virgins, are to be considered as belonging to the same caste as their fathers.

X.24. By adultery committed by persons of different castes, by marriages with women who ought not to be married, and by the neglect of the duties and occupations prescribed to each, are produced sons who owe their origin to a confusion of the castes.

VII.352. Men who commit adultery with the wives of others, the king shall cause to be marked by punishments which cause terror, and afterwards banish.

VII.353. For by adultery is caused a mixture of the castes among men; thence follows sin, which cuts up even the roots and causes the destruction of everything.

**DUTIES OF MEMBERS OF THE FOUR CASTES**

X.97. It is better to discharge one's own appointed duty incompletely than to perform completely that of another; for he who lives according to the law of another caste is instantly excluded from his own.

**Duties of a Brahmin**

X.75. Teaching, studying, sacrificing for himself, sacrificing for others, making gifts and receiving them are the six acts prescribed for a brahmin.

X.76. But among the six acts ordained for him three are his means of subsistence, sacrificing for others, teaching, and accepting gifts from pure men.

X.81. But a brahmin, unable to subsist by his peculiar occupations just mentioned, may live according to the law applicable to kshatriyas; for the latter is next to him in rank.

X.82. If it be asked, "How shall it be, if he cannot maintain himself by either of these occupations?" the answer is, he may adopt a vaisya's mode of life, employing himself in agriculture and rearing cattle.

X.83. But a brahmin, or a kshatriya, living by a vaisya's mode of subsistence, shall carefully avoid the pursuit of agriculture, which causes injury to many beings and depends on others.

X.85. But he who, through a want of means of subsistence, gives up the strictness with respect to his duties, may sell, in order to increase his wealth, the commodities sold by vaisyas, making however the following exceptions:

X.92. By selling flesh, salt, and lac [resin] a brahmin at once becomes an outcaste; by selling milk he becomes equal to a sudra in three days.

X.93. But by willingly selling in this world other forbidden commodities, a brahmin assumes after seven nights the character of a vaisya.

III.77. As all living creatures subsist by receiving support from air, even so the members of all orders subsist by receiving support from the householder.

III.78. Because men of the three other orders are daily supported by the householder with gifts of sacred knowledge and food, therefore the order of householders is the most excellent order.

III.89. And in accordance with the precepts of the Veda and of the traditional texts, the householder is declared to be superior to all of [the other three orders]; for he supports the other three.

**Duties of a Kshatriya**

VII.1. I will declare the duties of kings, and show how a king should conduct himself, . . . and how he can obtain highest success.

VII.2. A kshatriya who has received according to the rule the sacrament prescribed by the Veda, must duly protect this whole world.

VII.3. For, when these creatures, being without a king, through fear dispersed in all directions, the Lord created a king for the protection of this whole creation.

VII.14. For the king's sake the Lord formerly created his own son, Punishment, the protector of all creatures, an incarnation of the law, formed of Brahman's glory.

VII.18. Punishment alone governs all created beings, punishment alone protects them, punishment watches over them while they sleep; the wise declare punishment to be identical with the law.

VII.19. If punishment is properly inflicted after due consideration, it makes all people happy; but inflicted without consideration, it destroys everything.

VII.20. If the king did not, without tiring, inflict punishment on those worthy to be punished, the stronger would roast the weaker, like fish on a spit.

VII.35. The king has been created to be the protector of the castes and orders, who, all according to their rank, discharge their several duties.

VII.87. A king who, while he protects his people, is defied by foes, be they equal in strength, or stronger, or weaker, must not shrink from battle, remembering the duty of kshatriyas.

VII.88. Not to turn back in battle, to protect the people, to honour the brahmins, is the best means for a king to secure happiness.

VII.89. Those kings who, seeking to slay each other in battle, fight with the utmost exertion and do not turn back, go to heaven.

**Duties of a Vaisya**

IX.326. After a vaisya has received the sacraments and has taken a wife, he shall be always attentive to the business whereby he may subsist and to that of tending cattle.

IX.327. For when the Lord of creatures created cattle, he made them over to the vaisya; to the brahmins and the the king he entrusted all created beings.

IX.328. A vaisya must never conceive this wish, "I will not keep cattle"; and if a vaisya is willing to keep them, they must never be kept by men of other castes.

IX.329. A vaisya must know the respective value of gems, or pearls, of coral, of metals, of cloth made of thread, of perfumes, and of condiments.

IX.332. He must be acquainted with the proper wages of servants with the various languages of men, with the manner of keeping goods, and the rule of purchase and sale.

IX.333. Let him exert himself to the utmost in order to increase his property in a righteous manner, and let him zealously give food to all created beings.

**Duties of a Sudra**

IX.334. [T]o serve brahmins who are learned in the Vedas, householders, and famous for virtue, is the highest duty of a sudra, which leads to beatitude.

IX.335. A sudra who is pure, the servant of his betters, gentle in his speech, and free from pride, and always seeks a refuge with brahmins, attains a higher caste.

IX.413. But a sudra . . . may [be compelled] to do servile work; for he was created by the Self-existent [Lord] to be the slave of a brahmin.

IX.414. A sudra, though emancipated by his master, is not released from servitude; since that is innate in him, who can set him free from it?

From: *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*, edited by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

**CHAPTER IX.**

1. I will now propound the eternal laws for a husband and his wife who keep to the path of duty, whether they be united or separated.

2. Day and night woman must be kept in dependence by the males (of) their (families), and, if they attach themselves to sensual enjoyments, they must be kept under one's control.

3. Her father protects (her) in childhood, her husband protects (her) in youth, and her sons protect (her) in old age; a woman is never fit for independence.

4. Reprehensible is the father who gives not (his daughter in marriage) at the proper time; reprehensible is the husband who approaches not (his wife in due season), and reprehensible is the son who does not protect his mother after her husband has died.

5. Women must particularly be guarded against evil inclinations, however trifling (they may appear); for, if they are not guarded, they will bring sorrow on two families.

6. Considering that the highest duty of all castes, even weak husbands (must) strive to guard their wives.

7. He who carefully guards his wife, preserves (the purity of) his offspring, virtuous conduct, his family, himself, and his (means of acquiring) merit

11. Let the (husband) employ his (wife) in the collection and expenditure of his wealth, in keeping (everything) clean, in (the fulfilment of) religious duties, in the preparation of his food, and in looking after the household utensils.

12. Women, confined in the house under trustworthy and obedient servants, are not (well) guarded; but those who of their own accord keep guard over themselves, are well guarded.

13. Drinking (spirituous liquor), associating with wicked people, separation from the husband, rambling abroad, sleeping (at unseasonable hours), and dwelling in other men's houses, are the six causes of the ruin of women.

14. Women do not care for beauty, nor is their attention fixed on age; (thinking), '(It is enough that) he is a man,' they give themselves to the handsome and to the ugly.

15. Through their passion for men, through their mutable temper, through their natural heartlessness, they become disloyal towards their husbands, however carefully they may be guarded in this (world).

16. Knowing their disposition, which the Lord of creatures laid in them at the creation, to be such, (every) man should most strenuously exert himself to guard them.

17. (When creating them) Manu allotted to women (a love of their) bed, (of their) seat and (of) ornament, impure desires, wrath, dishonesty, malice, and bad conduct.

33. By the sacred tradition the woman is declared to be the soil, the man is declared to be the seed; the production of all corporeal beings (takes place) through the union of the soil with the seed.

34. In some cases the seed is more distinguished, and in some the womb of the female; but when both are equal, the offspring is most highly esteemed.

41. Never therefore must a prudent well-trained man, who knows the Veda and its Angas and desires long life, cohabit with another's wife.

48. As with cows, mares, female camels, slave-girls, buffalo-cows, she-goats, and ewes, it is not the begetter (or his owner) who obtains the offspring, even thus (it is) with the wives of others.

78. She who shows disrespect to (a husband) who is addicted to (some evil) passion, is a drunkard, or diseased, shall be deserted for three months (and be) deprived of her ornaments and furniture.

79. But she who shows aversion towards a mad or outcast (husband), a eunuch, one destitute of manly strength, or one afflicted with such diseases as punish crimes, shall neither be cast off nor be deprived of her property.

95. The husband receives his wife from the gods, (he does not wed her) according to his own will; doing what is agreeable to the gods, he must always support her (while she is) faithful.

96. To be mothers were women created, and to be fathers men; religious rites, therefore, are ordained in the Veda to be performed (by the husband) together with the wife.

101. 'Let mutual fidelity continue until death,' this may be considered as the summary of the highest law for husband and wife.

***Source 3 -* Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta: Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion** is thought to be a record of Buddha’s first sermon after he achieved enlightenment through meditation under the Bodhi Tree by the Neranjara river. He delivered it to five ascetic monks who he had fasted and suffered with for six years earlier in his spiritual quest, and purportedly overcame their skepticism to convince them that he had become an enlightened being. The passage includes a brief explanation of central Buddhist concepts such as the Middle Way and the Four Noble Truths.

Reading questions:

1. How does the Buddha’s explanation of the role of dharma (duty or purpose) differ from that of Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita, and how is it similar?

**Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta: Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion**

translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu [© 1993](https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn56/sn56.011.than.html#F_termsOfUse)

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying at Varanasi in the Game Refuge at Isipatana. There he addressed the group of five monks:

"There are these two extremes that are not to be indulged in by one who has gone forth. Which two? That which is devoted to sensual pleasure with reference to sensual objects: base, vulgar, common, ignoble, unprofitable; and that which is devoted to self-affliction: painful, ignoble, unprofitable. Avoiding both of these extremes, the middle way realized by the Tathagata — producing vision, producing knowledge — leads to calm, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to Unbinding.

"And what is the middle way realized by the Tathagata that — producing vision, producing knowledge — leads to calm, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to Unbinding? Precisely this Noble Eightfold Path: right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. This is the middle way realized by the Tathagata that — producing vision, producing knowledge — leads to calm, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to Unbinding.

"Now this, monks, is the noble truth of stress:[[1]](https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn56/sn56.011.than.html#fn-1) Birth is stressful, aging is stressful, death is stressful; sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair are stressful; association with the unbeloved is stressful, separation from the loved is stressful, not getting what is wanted is stressful. In short, the five clinging-aggregates are stressful.

"And this, monks, is the noble truth of the origination of stress: the craving that makes for further becoming — accompanied by passion & delight, relishing now here & now there — i.e., craving for sensual pleasure, craving for becoming, craving for non-becoming.

"And this, monks, is the noble truth of the cessation of stress: the remainderless fading & cessation, renunciation, relinquishment, release, & letting go of that very craving.

"And this, monks, is the noble truth of the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress: precisely this Noble Eightfold Path — right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

…

"And, monks, as long as this — my three-round, twelve-permutation knowledge & vision concerning these four noble truths as they have come to be — was not pure, I did not claim to have directly awakened to the right self-awakening unexcelled in the cosmos with its deities, Maras, & Brahmas, with its contemplatives & brahmans, its royalty & commonfolk. But as soon as this — my three-round, twelve-permutation knowledge & vision concerning these four noble truths as they have come to be — was truly pure, then I did claim to have directly awakened to the right self-awakening unexcelled in the cosmos with its deities, Maras & Brahmas, with its contemplatives & brahmans, its royalty & commonfolk. Knowledge & vision arose in me: 'Unprovoked is my release. This is the last birth. There is now no further becoming.'"

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, the group of five monks delighted at his words. And while this explanation was being given, there arose to Ven. Kondañña the dustless, stainless Dhamma eye: Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation.

And when the Blessed One had set the Wheel of Dhamma in motion, the earth devas cried out: "At Varanasi, in the Game Refuge at Isipatana, the Blessed One has set in motion the unexcelled Wheel of Dhamma that cannot be stopped by brahman or contemplative, deva, Mara or God or anyone in the cosmos." On hearing the earth devas' cry, the devas of the Four Kings' Heaven took up the cry... the devas of the Thirty-three... the Yama devas... the Tusita devas... the Nimmanarati devas... the Paranimmita-vasavatti devas... the devas of Brahma's retinue took up the cry: "At Varanasi, in the Game Refuge at Isipatana, the Blessed One has set in motion the unexcelled Wheel of Dhamma that cannot be stopped by brahman or contemplative, deva, Mara, or God or anyone at all in the cosmos."

**Source 4 –** The ***13th Rock Edict of Ashoka*** was one of a series of stone monuments that the Mauryan Empire king Ashoka ordered to be erected throughout his territory to communicate social and moral principles intended to address the challenges that society faced during the 3rd century BCE. There were at least 30 different edicts that were communicated on these pillars – this one tells the story of why Ashoka converted to Buddhism, and criticizes the destructive impacts of warfare, highlighting the brutal conquest of Kalinga that he completed in 260 BCE.

Reading questions:

1. How does this inscription reflect Buddhist principles?
2. What does it communicate about Ashoka’s understanding of dhamma (dharma)?
3. What seems to be unusual about Ashoka’s understanding of the causes and impacts of war in this source, and also what is unusual about the way that Ashoka describes his own actions, as an emperor?
4. In what ways is Ashoka’s message similar to that of other rulers of the ancient world in his connection with this faith, or in his description of events?
5. What do you suppose were Ashoka’s main purposes had when he had this edict erected?

***13th Major Rock Edict***

When he had been consecrated eight years the Beloved of the Gods, the king Piyadassi, conquered Kalinga. A hundred and fifty thousand people were deported, a hundred thousand were killed and many times that number perished. Afterwards, now that Kalinga was annexed, the Beloved of the Gods very earnestly practised Dhamma, desired Dhamma, and taught Dhamma, On conquering Kalinga the Beloved of the Gods felt remorse, for, when an independent country is conquered the slaughter, death, and deportation of the people is extremely grievous to the Beloved of the Gods, and weighs heavily on his mind. What is even more deplorable to the Beloved of the Gods, is that those who dwell there, whether brahmans, sramanas, or those of other sects, or householders who show obedience to their superiors, obedience to mother and father, obedience to their teachers and behave well and devotedly towards their friends, acquaintances, colleagues, relatives, slaves, and servants - all suffer violence, murder, and separation from their loved ones. Even those who are fortunate to have escaped, and whose love is undiminished [by the brutalizing effect of war], suffer from the misfortunes of their friends, acquaintances, colleagues, and relatives. This participation of all men in suffering, weighs heavily on the mind of the Beloved of the Gods. Except among the Greeks, there is no land where the religious orders of brahmanas and sramanasare not to be found, and there is no land anywhere where men do not support one sect or another. Today if a hundredth or a thousandth part of those people who were killed or died or were deported when Kalinga was annexed were to suffer similarly, it would weigh heavily on the mind of the Beloved of the Gods,

The Beloved of the Gods believes that one who does wrong should be forgiven as far as it is possible to forgive him. And the Beloved of the Gods conciliates the forest tribes of his empire, but he warns them that he has power even in his remorse and he asks them to repent, lest they be killed. For the Beloved of the Gods wishes that all beings should he unharmed, self-controlled, calm in mind, and gentle.

The Beloved of the Gods considers victory by Dhamma to be the foremost victory. And moreover the Beloved of the Gods has gained this victory on all his frontiers to a distance of six hundred yojanas [i.e.about 1500 miles], where reigns the Greek king named Antiochus, and beyond the realm of that Antiochus in the lands of the four kings named Ptolemy, Antigonus, Magas, and Alexander; and in the south over the Colas and Pandyas as far as Ceylon. Likewise here in the imperial territories among the Greeks and the Kambojas, Nabhakas and Nabhapanktis, Bhojasand Pitinikas, Andhras and Parindas, everywhere the people follow the Beloved of the Gods' instructions in Dhamma. Even where the envoys of the Beloved of the Gods have not gone, people hear of his conduct according to Dhamma, his precepts and his instruction in Dhamma, and they follow Dhamma and will continue to follow it.

What is obtained by this is victory everywhere, and everywhere victory is pleasant. This pleasure has been obtained through victory by Dhamma yet it is but a slight pleasure, for the Beloved of the Gods only looks upon that as important in its results which pertains to the next world.

This inscription of Dhamma has been engraved so that any sons or great grandsons that I may have should not think of gaining new conquest, and in whatever victories they may gain should be satisfied with patience and light punishment. They should only consider conquest by Dhamma to be a true conquest, and delight in Dhamma should be their whole delight, for this is of value in both this world and the next.