

Introduction to Religion: Ways of Inquiry

Oxford College of Emory University
Rel 100Q, Spring 2014: REL_OX 100Q-01J (#5965)
Tu/Th 1.40-3.30pm
Humanities Hall 201

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Office Hours: Tu 11am-12pm; Th 3.45pm-5.30pm; & by appt.
Location TBA (Hours pending until confirmed!)



Course Description

An introduction to *engaging* religion, this course provides an exploration of diverse ways of being religious in thought, action, community, and experience. The course is not a survey of religious traditions, nor is it simply an overview of how to study religion. Instead, we focus on three religious traditions—Judaism, Buddhism, and Shinto—using a range of methods and perspectives to give breadth and depth to our study. For each tradition, the course introduces students to key history, tenets, figures, practices, and sacred texts. Then, we use a case study approach to hone in on religious responses to catastrophic suffering during and in the wake of the Second World War/Pacific War. Such a focus highlights the complexities of religious experience, worldview, and ways of understanding “religion” and religious questions. Because this course also carries “Ways of Inquiry” credit, students explicitly examine the assumptions, methods, goals, and the way knowledge is created in religious studies and have the opportunity to practice and evaluate those methods.

Course Goals

After completing the course, students should be able to:

- Address (and generate!) questions and concerns relevant to the study of world religions, demonstrating an awareness of the breadth and depth of these questions and concerns
- Be familiar with a variety of approaches to understanding religion(s) and engaging religious questions, using these skills to interpret texts and cultural phenomena that have religious resonances or import
- Think and reflect critically on methods and categories in the study of religions
- Articulate the relationship between the category of “religion” and lived experiences or worldviews
- Convey a basic factual understanding of key history, tenets, figures, practices, and sacred texts in the traditions discussed in this course
- Explain why and how the problem of catastrophic suffering is an important “religious” issue for these traditions—and what approaches or methods are best suited for engaging this issue

Course Materials

The following full-length texts are required (unless indicated):

- Norman Solomon, *Judaism: A Very Short Introduction*: 978-0192853905
- Damien Keown, *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction*: 978-0192853868
- Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*: 978-0684826806
- Recommended: Kenzaburō Ōe, *The Crazy Iris: And Other Stories of the Atomic Aftermath*: 9780802151841

In *addition* to these texts, numerous other materials are required for this course. If not one of the required texts above, readings are available in .pdf form on the Blackboard site or e-reserves for our course (indicated by “BB” in the course schedule). Other digital materials will also be made available via Blackboard when possible.

Assignments/Assessment

Your final grade is comprised of **650 total points**, broken down as follows:

Opening Class Discussion: 60 points

Panel Presentations/ Responses: 70 points

Inquiry Assignments: 60 points

3 out of 4 required @ 20 pts each. If you submit all 4, the fourth can replace a previous low grade

Unit Exams: 120 points (2 @ 60 points each)

Synthetic Final Essay: 100 points

Site Visit Report: 80 points (includes site visit plan @ 10 points, and annotated bibliography @ 20 points)

Site Visit Report Presentation: 70 points (incl. peer evaluation and participation in evaluation of others @ 20 pts.)

Participation and attendance: 90 points

Required Readings

The syllabus lists the readings we will discuss on a given date. Therefore, students must **complete designated readings before class on that date and have texts in-hand**. For the required hard copy texts, students must bring their books; for electronic documents, students may bring hard copies or use laptops to bring electronic copies of documents to class. **The instructor reserves the right to require hard copies of electronic documents and prohibit laptop/tablet/reader use if this privilege is abused.**

Engaged, critical reading is expected and essential. Occasionally we will discuss texts that are difficult to read and understand. Write down questions and comments as you read; think critically about all texts before coming to class; take notes and underline compelling passages. These practices will help with discussion and writing assignments. You may face **unannounced reading quizzes or text checks** (applied to participation grade points) at any time, so come prepared!

Opening Class Discussion

NOTE: The exact configuration of this assignment will depend on enrollment. Each student will be assigned a day to open class discussion collaboratively as part of a small group. Dates will be assigned at random, but trading, on the student's initiative, is allowed as long as the instructor is notified.

The purpose of this assignment is for each student to open class discussion by connecting previous class discussion to the material for the new class and providing ideas for fresh discussion. Take good notes each class period (and while reading!) so that you can draw on your notes to **(1)** give a brief summary of the main points discussed in the previous class and remind the class of any unresolved issues worthy of further discussion. Then, **(2)** cite one passage from a text assigned for the day and explain its significance—as it relates to the reading(s) overall, previous class discussion, and other readings. **DO NOT SUMMARIZE THE READING.** If the reading is confusing, it can be very good practice to raise a question (or point of confusion) and then try to offer possible answer(s) to your own question. **(3)** Conclude your opening with a question or set of questions for discussion. Each prompt is worth 20 points of overall 60 point grade for this task. You have 5-10 minutes for your opening.

Panel Presentations/Responses

NOTE: The exact configuration of this assignment also will depend on enrollment. Each student will be assigned a day to be part of a panel presentation/response. Dates will be assigned at random, but trading, on the student's initiative, is allowed as long as the instructor is notified.

The purpose of this assignment is for each student to perform the role of an academic scholar of religion by offering a personal contribution to a synthetic understanding of an issue or problem in religion. While opening class discussion is meant as an in-classroom introduction to a text all students have read for the day, panel presentations offer the chance for a different experience. **Panelists** each introduce a reading with which other students will *not* be familiar, highlight its argument by explaining its salient points, relate the reading to the reading that everyone *is* assigned for the day, and interrogate the scholarly perspectives or methods used. **Respondents** (1-2 per panelist) will engage in active listening during the presentations to discuss, afterward, what the presented texts have in common (or how they differ), shared or differing methodologies (and the effect of those methodologies), and how the texts individually or taken together relate to the assigned reading for the day. Respondents then will raise one critical question for each panelist, and discussion will begin with the panelists addressing the questions before all of class is invited to respond. While respondents are not required to read thoroughly all of the readings assigned to panelists, respondents will be expected to be familiar enough with the readings to be able to think on their feet.

Inquiry Assignments

You will complete **3 out of 4** (please see additional handout) possible inquiry assignments through the course of the semester. Inquiry assignments are short (500-650 word) reading-response writing assignments that have three purposes: to hone your process of inquiry as you engage with texts, to develop your critical writing skills (especially in preparation for your longer essay, site report, and related work), and to hold you accountable for readings. **The assignments cover at least three modes of critical inquiry**—strategies for engaging your readings—and are applied to the reading assigned for a given class day (though you may relate the assigned reading[s] to others).

These assignments give you the opportunity to experience diverse modes of inquiry, test out what best works for you, and hone your skills in approaching texts in different ways. A list and description of how to write using these modes will be offered to you near the beginning of the semester to guide your reading and writing in the initial stages. Inquiry assignments are **due in hard copy (with name and numbered pages, stapled!)** at the *start of the class* on which the assignment is due. Assignments may be submitted early. **NO LATE ASSIGNMENTS will be accepted for any reason.**

Site Visit Report and Presentation

An overarching goal of this course is for you to cultivate an understanding and appreciation of religious traditions (and approaches to religion) different from your own. An excellent way to solidify this understanding and appreciation is to visit an unfamiliar religious site (generally for worship or another ritual experience). You therefore will **visit one religious site** to participate in such an experience and then write a **1000-1250 word essay** about the site and your experiences. Stretch yourself to select a tradition very unfamiliar to you. You may undertake these site visits in small collaborative groups, or you may attend with a friend who is more familiar with your chosen tradition. Each student, however, must write an individual paper and present individually (or, depending on circumstances, in pairs). For your visit, remember that you are a representative of our class and are a guest of the site you visit. You are expected to behave politely, respectfully and appropriately; be careful to avoid disrespect to and intimidation of the community members of whom you are a guest. We will discuss proper behavior and assignment specifics more in class. Your final site visit report is **due via SafeAssign on Blackboard by 5pm on your scheduled presentation date (submit early if your afternoon schedule conflicts with the submission deadline)**, but be aware that this is an assignment completed in stages with other relevant deadlines (see course schedule).

Unit Exams

There are two 60-point in-class written exams for the course. These utilize a range of responses to aid and assess (a) your retention of facts about a tradition's/traditions' history, tenets, figures, practices, and sacred texts, and (b) your ability to synthesize and analyze course information. More details will be released prior to the first test.

Synthetic Final Essay

After developing your writing in your regular inquiry assignments, you will write a **2200-2500 word** synthetic essay for the course. You will be provided a topic or topic guidelines, but you also may adjust your topic *in collaboration with (and with approval of) the instructor*. The essay will require familiarity with readings, material presented in class, and films (if applicable) as well as the ability to synthesize connections between material and across traditions. The final essay takes the place of a final exam and is **due by 5pm via Blackboard SafeAssign on the date of the scheduled final exam for our class: Friday, May 2**. Plan ahead so that technical and other emergencies will not prevent on-time submission! No late submissions will be accepted!

Draft and Workshop: Plan to complete one full rough draft of your essay for the purposes of editing and rewriting it. A writing workshop—attendance optional—will be offered in the evening sometime during the last two weeks of class. **All students, however, are also required to meet individually with the instructor to discuss the preparation or revision of their final essay drafts between April 15 and April 30.** Specific slots will be offered for sign-up, but it is your responsibility to schedule your meeting at a mutually agreeable time. Failure to meet with the instructor prior to submission of your final essay will result in a deduction of one full letter grade (i.e., the highest grade an A paper can earn would be a B).

Submission: Final drafts of written work must be **submitted electronically using the Blackboard SafeAssign** feature. *Do not email* your assignments to the instructor. It is your responsibility to ensure that you understand how to use SafeAssign in order to submit your assignments properly and on time. Please consult with Oxford IT if you are unfamiliar with this feature or unsure about using it.

Please note that material submitted will be screened by Blackboard's SafeAssign feature against a variety of databases. The purpose of this feature is to minimize plagiarism and to help educate students about the proper citation of any borrowed content. The submission of another's work as one's own without adequate attribution is a violation of the Honor Code and may result in disciplinary action.

Student work submitted as part of this course may be reviewed by Oxford College and Emory College faculty and staff for the purposes of improving instruction and enhancing Emory education.

Participation

- This course focuses on class discussion as part of our developing ways of inquiry appropriate to the academic study of religion. Class discussion allows us to share our ideas and work out questions from the readings and other issues brought up in class. It also helps us meet our course goals, prepare for tests and quizzes, write essays and reflections, and make connections between classes.
- Complete class reading and writing assignments and come prepared to discuss them even if you have not prepared an inquiry assignment for that day or if it is not your day to open discussion.
- Come to class ready to respond to the classmates who open discussion for the day, to panelists and responders, and to other classmates' ideas.
- Remain engaged and on-task in class.
- Remember that participation is about quality more than quantity, but be intellectually brave and do your best to contribute frequently to the discussion to the best of your ability.
- If you are profoundly uncomfortable participating verbally in class, email exchange or office hour meetings with the instructor regarding questions, concerns, and ideas about class material also can count toward your participation grade.

Attendance

- Attendance is an integral part of participation. It is impossible to duplicate what happens in class in any other format, and you must be present to receive vital information and announcements. Be in class regularly, be on time, and be prepared and ready for discussion. Attendance will be recorded.
- While you are required to be in class every period, ***you will be granted three flex days—absences that will not affect your final grade.*** If, however, you ***miss more than three classes for any reason, your final grade will be lowered by one-third of a letter grade*** (i.e., from an A to A-) for *each* extra day missed.
- Your flex days cover all absences—illness, emergencies, religious holidays not observed by the university, and travel (personal or university-related, such as for athletics). Extenuating circumstances may be excused at the instructor's discretion if discussed in advance, but simply *informing* the instructor of an upcoming absence or the reasons for an absence does not suffice to *excuse* the absence. Plan ahead!
- Arriving late is rude and distracting to your classmates and instructor; it also detracts from your ability to contribute to discussion. Make every effort to be in class on time. ***If you arrive more than 10 minutes late more than once, you will be counted as present but receive no credit for participation for that day.*** Excessive lateness will count as an absence.
- If you must miss class, you are responsible for completing any assignments due on the missed day as well as getting notes from your classmates, etc. You may consult with me about what you missed, but I will not necessarily replicate notes or announcements—find a reliable classmate to help keep you on track.

The Grading System is as Follows:

A: 93-100	B+: 88-89	C+: 78-79	D+: 68-69	F: <60
A-: 90-92	B: 83-87	C: 73-77	D: 60-67	
	B-: 80-82	C-: 70-72		

Expectations

What I expect from you:

- Thorough awareness of and adherence to course policies, assignments, and expectations as outlined in this syllabus, in the student handbook, and described in class.
- **Respectful participation:** You are not asked to leave your religious views (or lack of them) at the door, but I urge respect and consideration while reflecting on or challenging your own beliefs, practices, and values and those that you learn about throughout the course. Remember that your classmates may have connections to

many of the religions, practices, or texts we discuss. Treat your classmates, instructor, and any guests with respect. **Do not talk, text, email, check social media, surf the web, etc.** Such actions are truly distracting and disrespectful and are grounds for dismissal from class or prohibition of electronic devices.

What you can expect from me

- I will make every effort to cultivate a learning environment in which students are able and encouraged to express their questions and ideas respectfully.
- I will keep regular office hours, and I encourage you to come to office hours with any questions, concerns, or ideas you may have. I will respond to emails as quickly and attentively as possible. I will provide notice as early as possible via blackboard email list if class is canceled for any emergency.
- I will support, be aware of, and hold you accountable for your work, attendance, and participation.
- I will offer feedback on your submitted work in a timely manner and be available to discuss your work both before it is submitted and after you receive feedback on it. I aim to evaluate your work fairly and thoroughly.

Academic Integrity Statement

The Oxford College Student Honor Code holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the Policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about instructor and general academic expectations with regard to **proper citation of sources** in written work. The policy also governs the **integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments** as well as **verifications of participation** in class activities. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort. For more information and the complete policy, see <http://oxford.emory.edu/academics/student-services/student-honor-code/>

Statement Regarding Disability-Related Accommodations and Serious Illness

Students who are in need of disability-related academic accommodations must register with the Office of Access, Disability, Services and Resources (ADSR)—formerly (and still, in some places) known as the Office of Disability Services (ODS). Oxford College's program functions as a seamless extension of services offered to students at the Emory campus location, with staff located in the Student Health/Counseling Center. Students are responsible for initiating the accommodation request process by self-disclosing their disability and/or chronic medical condition directly to ADSR. More detailed information is available on the website at www.ods.emory.edu. A student can also make requests directly to the Office of Disability Services, Emory University, 201 Dowman Drive, University Administration Building, Suite 110, Atlanta, GA 30322. [Policy cited from <http://oxford.emory.edu/life-at-oxford/disability-services/>] Accommodations are not provided retroactively, and the process of receiving accommodations takes time and planning among multiple persons and offices; therefore, plan for accommodations as early as possible.

Changes to the Syllabus

The instructor reserves the right to amend the syllabus (or the course in general) during the course of the semester. If changes are made, you will receive advance notice.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Important Dates

Tu Jan 14: Classes Begin

Tu Jan 21: End of course changes

Wed Mar 5: Midterm Deficiency Reports

Fri Mar 7: Last day for dropping courses without academic penalty

Mar 10-14 (M-F): Spring Break!

Fri Apr 4: Last day for one-time course withdrawal for freshmen

Th Apr 24: Last day of this class

Introduction

Weeks 1-2: Getting Started

Tu Jan 14: Introduction to class: brief overview of syllabus, etc.

Th Jan 16: Problem of catastrophic suffering, context of WWII, why these religions

Tu Jan 21: In-depth review of syllabus, introductions, finish introduction to study of religions

Judaism

Weeks 2-4: Intro to Judaism and the Problem of Suffering

Th Jan 23: Intro to Judaism: History, Tenets, Figures, Practice

Read for today: *Judaism: A Very Short Introduction (VSI)*, **Terms** on p.2, **Ch 1** (read all; focus closely on pp.10-15), **Ch. 2** (only pp.18-23), **Ch. 3** (read pp.31-36 [through end of Stammaim], plus sections on Rashi, Maimonides, Nasi, Baal Shem Tov, Mendelssohn [pp. 39-41, 42-44, 45-53]), **Appendix A** (p.136)

⚙ Class Opening Assignments and Panel Presentation Assignments made

⚙ May save syllabus details and introductions for today

Tu Jan 28: Intro to Judaism: History, Tenets, Figures, Practice

Read for today: *Judaism VSI*, **Chs. 4 & 5** (read all), **Ch. 6** (pp. 84-91, 97), **Ch. 7** (pp. 100-108)

⚙ [First Class Opening](#)

Th Jan 30: Intro to Judaism: Sacred Texts

First Panel Presentations

Read for today: All: Exodus selections – see guide (BB)

Panelists: (1) Deuteronomy, (2) Lamentations, (3) Job selections – see guide (BB)

⚙ Distribute Exam 1 study guide

Tu Feb 4: Flex Day

Read for today: TBA

Th Feb 6: Catch up and review

Read for today: Work on study guide questions and bring to class

Weeks 5-6: Testimony as Religious Practice: Judaism

Tu Feb 11: *EXAM 1*

Th Feb 13: Testimony as Religious Practice

Read for today: Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*, Author's preface through end of "Initiation"

⚙ [Class Opening](#)

⚙ Distribute and discuss Site Visit Report Instructions

Tu Feb 18: **Panel presentations**

Read for today: All: Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*, "This Side of Good and Evil" and "The Drowned and the Saved"

Panelists: (1) "Ka-Be" and "Our Nights," (2) "The Work" and "A Good Day," (3) "Chemical Examination" and "The Canto of Ulysses," (4) "The Events of the Summer" and "October 1944"

Th Feb 20: *SITE VISIT PLAN DUE*

Read for today: Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*, "Kraus" through "The Story of Ten Days"

⚙ *LAST DAY for SET ONE IAs*

⚙ [Class Opening](#)

⚙ View Resnais' *Night and Fog*; Discuss Levi and Resnais

Week 7: Religious Responses

Tu Feb 25: Panel presentations

Read for today: All: Introduction and conclusion in Steven Katz, "Jewish Faith After the Holocaust: Four Approaches," *Post-Holocaust Dialogues* (141-145, 168-end) *All Katz on BB*

Panelists: (1) **Rubenstein** in Katz, "Jewish Faith After the Holocaust: Four Approaches," (145-150); (2) **Fackenheim** in Katz, "Jewish Faith After the Holocaust: Four Approaches," (150-155); (3) **Maybaum** in Katz, "Jewish Faith After the Holocaust: Four Approaches," (155-163); (4) **Berkovits** in Katz, "Jewish Faith After the Holocaust: Four Approaches," (163-167)

Th Feb 27: Flex Day

Read for today: TBA

Buddhism and Shinto

Weeks 8-10: Buddhism

Tu Mar 4: Intro to Buddhism: History, Tenets, Figures, Practice

Read for today: *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction* (VSI): Selections from **Ch. 2**, **Ch. 5**, **Ch. 6**, and **Ch. 9**:
Specifics: **Ch. 2**, "The Buddha," all; **Ch. 5**, "The Mahayana," Read from the beginning and stop at section "Philosophical Developments" (should include sections on "Schism," "New Emphasis," "New Ideas about Buddha," "Mahayana Sutras"); **Ch. 6**, "Buddhism in Asia," Read sections on "Ashoka," "Buddhism in India," "Sri Lanka," "China," "Japan," "Tibet;" **Ch. 9**, "Buddhism in the West," Read section "Buddhist Schools in the West"

⚙ [Class Opening](#)

Th Mar 6: *SITE VISIT ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE* Buddhism History, Tenets, Figures, Practice cont'd.

Read for today: *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction* (VSI): Selections from **Ch. 3**, **Ch. 4**, **Ch. 7**, and **Ch. 8**:
Specifics: **Ch.3**, "Karma and Rebirth," Read from beginning and stop at section "Three Spheres of Existence" (should include opening and sections on "Buddhist Universe" and "Six Realms"); then read sections on "Karma" and "Merit;" **Ch. 4**, "The Four Noble Truths," all; **Ch. 7**, "Meditation," Read opening, "Indian Background," "Nature of Meditation," "Practice of Meditation," "Four Measureless States," "Insight Meditation," and closing "Summary;" **Ch. 8**, "Ethics," Read "Dharma," "Virtues," "Ahimsa" and "Skilful Means"

⚙ *LAST DAY for SET TWO IAs*

⚙ [Class Opening](#)

Tu Mar 11: NO CLASS – Spring Break

Th Mar 13: NO CLASS – Spring Break

Tu Mar 18: Buddhist Sacred Texts: Panel presentations

Read for today: Selections from *Anthology of World Scriptures* (BB); All: "The Essence of Mahayana Buddhism" and "The Life of Siddhartha Gotama"

Panelists: (1) "Past Lives of Siddhartha Gotama" and "Death of Gotama Buddha;" (2) "Four Noble Truths" and "Noble Eightfold Path;" (3) "Mahayana View of the Buddha" and "Blessings of the Pure Land;" (4) "Conduct of the Monk," "Admonition to Laity," "Mindfulness in Meditation"

Weeks 10-11: Shinto and Japanese Religions

Th Mar 20: Intro to Japanese Religions: Religious History, Tenets, Figures, Practice

Read for today: Introduction, pp.13-26, and Ueda, "Shinto," pp.27-42, in *Religion in Japanese Culture* (BB)

⚙ *LAST DAY for SET THREE IAs*

⚙ [Class Opening](#)

⚙ Distribute Exam 2 study guide and Final Essay topic/guidelines

Tu Mar 25: Catch up and review

Read for today: Review study guide questions and bring to class

☼ Start Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* and review

Th Mar 27: Flex Day

Read for today: TBA

☼ Finish Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* and review; Discuss essay topic and guidelines

Week 12: Testimony as Religious Practice: Buddhism and Shinto

Tu Apr 1: *EXAM 2*

Th Apr 3: Testimony as Religious Practice

Read for today: Hara's "Summer Flower" (BB) and in *The Crazy Iris*, read Ōta's "Fireflies" (85-111)

☼ [Class Opening](#)

☼ View clips from *Barefoot Gen*

Week 13: Testimony as Religious Practice and Religious Responses

Tu Apr 8: **Panel Presentations**

Read for today: All: In *The Crazy Iris*, read Hara's "The Land of Heart's Desire" (55-62)

Panelists: (1) In *The Crazy Iris*, Oda's "Human Ashes," (2) In *The Crazy Iris*, Hayashi's "The Empty Can," (3) In *The Crazy Iris*, Takenishi's "The Rite," (4) On BB, Toge's poem selections

Th Apr 10: Postwar Buddhist and Shinto responses to wartime suffering; **Panel Presentations**

Read for today: All: Miyamoto, "Beyond Good and Evil," pp. 81-91 (BB)

Panelists: (1) Miyamoto, "Beyond Good and Evil," 96-110; (2) Miyamoto, "Dialogue with the Dead," pp. 47-58; (3) Miyamoto, "Dialogue with the Dead," pp. 64-77 (all BB)

☼ *LAST DAY for SET FOUR IAs*

☼ Screen John Nelson, "Spirits of the State"

Weeks 14-15: Site Visit Presentations (and Required Writing Meetings Begin)

Tu Apr 15:

☼ Presentations and peer evaluation

Th Apr 17:

☼ Presentations and peer evaluation

Tu Apr 22:

☼ Presentations and peer evaluation

Th Apr 24: Last Day of Class: Wrap up

☼ Last Day of Presentations and peer evaluation

Fri May 2: *FINAL ESSAY DUE*

Turn in by 5pm via SafeAssign on Blackboard