

# Introduction to Religion

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Oxford College of Emory University

Rel 100, Fall 2013

Tu/Th 11.50am-1.30pm (Section 11J, Class #5495)

Tu/Th 3.30pm-5.10pm (Section 03J, Class #6344)

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**Office Hours:** Tu/Th, 2.00pm-3.00pm and by appointment  
Seney 115D (Dr. David Gowler's office, The Thinkery)



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## 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.

## Course Goals

After completing the course, students should be able to:

- Understand (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

## 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
- 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 **600 total points**, broken down as follows:

**Opening Class Discussion:** 70 points

**Inquiry Assignments:** 80 points

4 out of 5 required @ 20 pts each. If you submit all 5, the fifth will count as extra credit (up to 20 pts)

**Unit Exams:** 180 points (3 @ 60 points each)

**Synthetic Final Essay:** 100 points

**Site Visit Report:** 80 points (includes site visit plan)

**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 use if this privilege is abused.

Engaged, critical reading is expected. 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 one or two days to open class discussion, either alone or in 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 the previous class discussion to the reading 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. You have 5-10 minutes for your opening.

### *Inquiry Assignments*

You will complete **4 out of 5** possible inquiry assignments through the course of the semester. Inquiry assignments are short 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 and site report), and to hold you accountable for readings. The assignments cover at least three modes of 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 electronically, by midnight** on the *night before the class* on which the assignment is due. **NO LATE ASSIGNMENTS will be accepted.**

### *Unit Tests*

There are three 50-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 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*

While 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, but you also may adjust this 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 essay is **due on the last day of class, Tuesday 10 December, 10 minutes before the start of class**. Plan ahead so that technical and other emergencies will not prevent on-time submission!

Essay Format: Essays must be typed and double-spaced in a standard 12-point font with 1-inch margins. Pages should be **numbered**. You must cite author/editor and page number when referring to class materials but are not required to include a bibliography unless you use additional sources (with permission only) or a different edition of a class text. More detailed instructions and a grading rubric will be handed out prior to the essay.

Submission: 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. Plan ahead so that technical and other emergencies will not prevent on-time submission!

*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.

#### *Site Visit Report*

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 will **visit one religious site** to participate in such an experience and then write a **1000-1700 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. 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 site visit report is **due via SafeAssign on Blackboard by 5pm on your scheduled final exam date**.

#### *Participation*

- This course focuses on class discussion. 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, make connections between classes, and prepare for exams.
- 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 classmate who opens discussion for the day.
- 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 illness, emergencies, religious holidays not observed by the university, and travel (personal or university-related). 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.
- 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 message, email, surf the web, etc.** Such actions are truly distracting and disrespectful.

*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/audiences/current\\_students/Academic/academic-success/student-honor-code/](http://oxford.emory.edu/audiences/current_students/Academic/academic-success/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](http://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/academics/catalog/educational-resources/disability-services/>] Accommodations are not provided retroactively; 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.

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## COURSE SCHEDULE

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### Introduction

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#### *Weeks 1-2: Getting Started*

**Th Aug 29:** Introduction to class: syllabus, etc.

**Tu Sep 3:** Problem of catastrophic suffering, context of WWII, why these religions

**W Sep 4:** Last day for schedule adjustment

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### Judaism

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#### *Weeks 2-3: Intro to Judaism and the Problem of Suffering*

**Th Sep 5:** 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 Stammim], plus sections on Rashi, Maimonides, Nasi, Baal Shem Tov, Mendelssohn [pp. 39-41, 42-44, 45-53]), **Appendix A** (p.136)

**Tu Sep 10:** 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

#### *Weeks 3-4: Intro to Judaism and the Problem of Suffering*

**Th Sep 12:** Sacred text

**Read for today:** Deuteronomy selections—see guide (BB)

✧ Class Opening

✧ Discuss Deuteronomy; Workshop: building study guide

**Tu Sep 17:** Sacred text

**Read for today:** Job selections—see guide (BB)

✧ Class Opening

✧ Discuss Job; Distribute study guide

**Th Sep 19:** 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 Sep 24: \*TEST 1\***

**Th Sep 26:** NO CLASS (Instructor at conference)

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

**Tu Oct 1: \*FIRST INQUIRY ASSIGNMENT\***

**Read for today:** Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*, "Ka-Be," "Our Nights," "The Events of the Summer," "October 1944"

✧ Class Opening

**Th Oct 3**

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

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

#### *Week 7: Religious Responses*

**Tu Oct 8: \*INQUIRY ASSIGNMENT\***

**Read for today:** Read Steven Katz, "Jewish Faith After the Holocaust: Four Approaches," *Post-Holocaust Dialogues* (141-73) [BB]

✧ Class Opening

**Th Oct 10**

**Read for today:** TBA

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### **Buddhism and Shinto**

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#### *Weeks 8-10: Buddhism*

**Tu Oct 15:** NO CLASS—Fall Break

**W Oct 16:** Midterm Reports Due

**Th Oct 17:** Intro to Buddhism: History, Tenets, Figures, Practice

**Read for today:** *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction* (VSI): **Ch. 2** (all), **Ch. 5** (pp.57-66), **Ch. 6** (pp.70-73, 75-83), and **Ch. 9** (pp.116-119).

✧ Class Opening

**Tu Oct 22:** Buddhism History, Tenets, Figures, Practice cont'd

**Read for today:** *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction* (VSI): **Ch. 3** (pp.29-35, 37-40), **Ch. 4** (all), **Ch. 7** (pp. 84-89, 91-92, 93-96), and **Ch. 8** (pp. 97-101, 107-109)

✧ Class Opening

**Th Oct 24:** Sacred Texts: **\*INQUIRY ASSIGNMENT\***

**Read for today:** Selections from *Anthology of World Scriptures* (BB) TBA

✧ Class Opening

✧ Distribute study guide

**Tu Oct 29:** Catch up and review

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

✧ Review; Distribute and discuss Site Visit Report Instructions

**Th Oct 30: \*TEST 2\***

#### *Weeks 11-12: Shinto and Japanese Religions*

**Tu Nov 5:** Intro to Japanese Religions: Shinto and Japanese Religious History, Tenets, Figures, Practice

**Read for today:** *Religion in Japanese Culture* pp.13-26 (BB)

⊗ Class Opening

**Th Nov 7:** Shinto History, Tenets, Figures, Practice cont'd

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

⊗ Discuss Shinto; Start Miyazaki's *Spirited Away*; Distribute study guide

**Tu Nov 12:** Catch up and review: \*SITE VISIT PLAN DUE\*

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

⊗ Finish Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* and review

**Th Nov 14:** \*TEST 3\*

⊗ Distribute essay topic to discuss on Tuesday

*Weeks 13-14: Testimony as Religious Practice: Buddhism and Shinto*

**Tu Nov 19** \*INQUIRY ASSIGNMENT\*

**Read for today:** In *The Crazy Iris*, read Hara's "Summer Flower" (37-54) and Ōta's "Fireflies" (85-111)

⊗ View clips from *Barefoot Gen*; Discuss essay topic and guidelines

**Th Nov 21**

**Read for today:** In *The Crazy Iris*, read either Oda's "Human Ashes," Hayashi's "The Empty Can," or Takenishi's "The Rite" (your selection will be assigned) and come prepared to present to class in groups.

**Tu Nov 26:** NO CLASS (Instructor at conference)

**Read for today:** Work on Essay and Site Visit/Report

**Th Nov 28:** NO CLASS—Thanksgiving

*Weeks 15-16: Religious Responses*

**Tu Dec 3:** Postwar Buddhist responses to wartime suffering: \*INQUIRY ASSIGNMENT\*

**Read for today:** Miyamoto, "Beyond Good and Evil," pp. 81-91, 96-110 (BB) **and** Yoneyama pp.135-143 (BB)

⊗ Class Opening

**Th Dec 5:** Postwar State Shinto and the Issue of Yasukuni Jinja

**Read for today:** Miyamoto, "Dialogue with the Dead," pp. 47-48, 52-58, 64-77 (BB)

⊗ Screen John Nelson, "Spirits of the State"

⊗ Class Opening

**Tu Dec 10:** \*FINAL ESSAY DUE\*

⊗ Last Day of Class: Wrap up

**FINAL EXAMS:** Your SITE VISIT REPORT IS DUE via **SafeAssign** by 5pm on your final exam date. There is no other final exam for this class.