Asian Religions

PHRE-300 / Fall 2016

Phillips Academy

Mr. Prescott



**Instructor:** Mr. Prescott

**Location:** Chapel 015

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Course Description

An introduction to religious studies through examining some of the traditions that originated and flourished in Asia and are practiced by people throughout the world today. Using an approach that is both critical and empathetic, students will explore fundamental structures of belief, meaning, and practice that constitute the traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Chinese religion, the diversity within each of these traditions, and their multiple manifestations throughout the world. In doing so, students will explore their own essential questions of meaning in dialogue with these traditions.

Course Requirements, Evaluation, and Policies

**I. Required Texts:**

1. Laurie Patton, trans., *The Bhagavad Gita*

2. Dalai Lama, *Ethics for the New Millennium*

3. Additional texts will be made available in class and posted on Canvas

**II. Evaluation**

**i. Classroom Preparation/Participation (30%) –** Much of this class will proceed as a seminar, which means careful reading of assigned work, regular attendance, and participation in class are all essential in order to succeed in the course. It is not enough to merely run our eyes over the pages: we must be active in our effort to understand what we are reading. In order aid this process, students will be asked to complete **1-page reflection papers** in conjunction their readings (generally speaking, one per week on a night of the student's choosing). A separate handout on reflection papers will be provided. Additional prompts will also be assigned in-class throughout the term, which will also be factored into the participation grade.

**ii. Short Essays (70%) –** Students will be assigned a variety of essays over the course of the term, ranging from two five pages in length. More specific information about the nature of these essays will be provided closer to their corresponding due dates. There will also be class time set aside for working on each paper on the meeting prior to its due date.

**a. Bhagavad Gita Essay (25%)** – Due Tuesday, October 4

**b. Modern Hinduism Essay (15%)** – Due Monday, October 17

**c. Buddhism Final Project (30%)** – Due Thursday, November 17

**III. Late Work Policy –** The baseline expectation is that all written assignments will be handed in at the beginning of class on the date they are due (not 15 minutes after class has started). If a student has a scheduling conflict or multiple major assignments due on the same date, **it is the student’s responsibility to speak to me beforehand** about appropriate accommodations (the earlier the better). An e-mail the night before is not sufficient. Also, please note that technological difficulties are **not** an excuse for lateness. Anticipate that the printer will break, that files will be lost, or that your computer will die! **Any work handed in after the due date will receive a grade no higher than a 4.**

**IV. Rewrite Policy** – All essays that receive a grade of 3- or lower must be rewritten. In addition, all students may choose to rewrite one essay per term. Revisions must be substantial; it is not sufficient simply to plug in the instructor’s feedback. The grade for the rewrite will be averaged with the first grade to determine the final grade for the assignment. All rewrites are due one week after the initial essay is returned. Please note that I do not accept rewrites for unauthorized late essays.

**V. Absences** - As noted above under Classroom Preparation/Participation, regular attendance is essential if one is to succeed in this course. However, I realize that this course is not your only commitment this term, just as I realize that circumstances inevitably arise that our outside of your control. First and foremost, I ask that you communicate (the earlier the better). Please note that students are responsible for all announcements or changes made in class. Last, in the event that an assignment is due on the day a student is sick (with an excused absence from the Health Center), said assignment will be due at the beginning of the next class meeting.

**VI. E-mail** – I will respond to all e-mail within 24 hours. However, please note that any e-mail sent after 8:00 PM will not receive a response until the following morning, so please plan ahead!

**VII. Religious Observances –** Some students may wish to take part in religious observances that fall during the term. Should you have a religious observance that conflicts with participation in the course, please contact me as soon as possible to discuss appropriate accommodations.

**VIII. Disabilities –** Students with learning, physical, or psychiatric disabilities who may require disability-related classroom accommodations are encouraged to see me as soon as possible to discuss your particular needs. All discussions will remain confidential, though I may consult Student Health Services to discuss appropriate implementation of any accommodation requested.

**Unit 1: The Hindu Tradition**

**Thursday, September 8 – Course Introduction & Overview**

* No assigned readings

**Week 1 – Introduction to Hinduism**

**Tuesday, September 13 – Plato’s Cave**

* Read: Plato, *The Republic*, VII.514A-521B.
* Due: Drawing of Plato’s Cave

**Thursday, September 15 – Introduction to the Hindu Tradition**

* Read: Gary Gutting, “What Would Krishna Do? Or Shiva? Or Vishnu?” *The New York Times* (August 3, 2014).

**Friday, September 16 – The Bhagavad Gita**

* Read: Laurie L. Patton, trans., *The Bhagavad Gita*, pp. 3-15.

**Week 2 – The Bhagavad Gita**

**Tuesday, September 20 – The Bhagavad Gita**

* Read: Laurie L. Patton, trans., *The Bhagavad Gita*, pp. 16-35.

**Thursday, September 22 – The Bhagavad Gita**

* Read: Laurie L. Patton, trans., *The Bhagavad Gita*, pp. 36-69.

**Friday, September 23 – The Bhagavad Gita**

* Read: Laurie L. Patton, trans., *The Bhagavad Gita*, pp. 70-100.

**Week 3 – The Bhagavad Gita**

**Tuesday, September 27 – The Bhagavad Gita**

* Read: Laurie L. Patton, trans., *The Bhagavad Gita*, pp. 101-122.

**Thursday, September 29 – The Bhagavad Gita**

* Read: Laurie L. Patton, trans., *The Bhagavad Gita*, pp. 123-144.

**Friday, September 30 – Writing Workshop**

* No assigned readings

**Unit 2: Hinduism and the Modern World**

**Week 4 – Caste and Capitalism in Modern India**

**Tuesday, October 4 – India and the British Raj**

* Due: Bhagavad Gita Essay

**Thursday, October 6 – Caste and Capitalism in Modern India**

* Read: Lydia Polgreen, “Scaling Caste Walls With Capitalism’s Ladders in India,” *The New York Times* (December 21, 2011).

**Friday, October 7 – Gender, Caste, and Capitalism**

* Read: Ellen Barry, “Young Rural Women in India Chase Big-City Dreams,” *The New York Times* (September 24, 2016)

**Week 5 – Hinduism and the Global West**

**Monday, October 10 – The Rise of Yoga**

* Read: Wendy Doniger, “Assume the Position: The Fight Over the Body of Yoga,” in *On Hinduism*, pp. 116-125.
* Read: Aseem Shukla, “On Faith: The Theft of Yoga,” *Hindu American Foundation* (April 18, 2010).

**Thursday, October 13 – Hinduism and Popular Culture**

* Read: Mark I. Pinsky, “Miscellaneous: ‘Hindu! There Are 700 Million of Us!” in *The Gospel According to The Simpsons*, pp. 146-155.

**Friday, October 14 – Research Workshop**

* Due: Thesis Statement

**Unit 3: Buddhism**

**Week 6 – Introduction to Buddhism**

**Monday, October 17 – The Life of the Buddha**

* Due: Essay #2

**Thursday, October 20 – The Four Noble Truths**

* Read: Buddhist Teaching Stories

**Friday, October 21 – The Quest for Human Happiness**

* Read: Dalai Lama, “Preface” and “The Quest for Human Happiness,” in *Ethics for the New Millennium* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1999), xi-xiv and 3-17.

**Week 7 – The Source of Dukkha**

**Tuesday, October 25 – Introduction to Mindfulness**

* Read: Jan Chozen Bays, “Introduction,” *How to Train a Wild Elephant* (Boston; London: Shambhala, 2011), 1-18.

**Thursday, October 27 – The Evolution of Suffering**

* Read: Rick Hanson and Richard Mendius, “The Evolution of Suffering,” *Buddha’s Brain*, pp. 23-48.

**Friday, October 28 – The Nature of Reality**

* Read: Dalai Lama, “Dependent Origination and the Nature of Reality,” *Ethics for the New Millennium* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1999), 35-47.

**Week 8 – Understanding Buddhist Reality**

**Tuesday, November 1 – The Parable of the Burning House**

* Read: Burton Watson, trans., *The Lotus Sutra* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 56-62.

**Thursday, November 3 – Buddhism and Race**

* Group 1: Rod Owens, “Woman Hold My Hand,” *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 44:1-2 (2016): 19-26.
* Group 2: Bonnie Duran, “Mistaking a Stick for a Snake,” *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 44:1-2 (2016): 27-33.
* Group 3: Bryan Mendiola, “Giving the Ghost a Voice,” *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 44:1-2 (2016): 33-38.
* Group 4: Christopher Raiche, “#BlackLivesMatter and Living the Bodhisattva Vow,” *Harvard Divinity Bulleti* 44:1-2 (2016): 38-44.

**Friday, November 4 – Redefining the Goal**

* Read: Dalai Lama, “Redefining the Goal,” *Ethics for the New Millennium* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1999), 49-62

**Week 9 – Responding to Suffering**

**Tuesday, November 8 – How You Think**

* Read: Dalai Lama, “The Supreme Emotion,” *Ethics for the New Millennium* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1999), 63-77.

**Thursday, November 10 – Buddhism and Gender**

* Read: Susan Murcott, “Mahapajapati Gotami and Her Disciples,” *The First Buddhist Women: Translations and Commentaries on the Therigatha* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1991), 13-21, 197.

**Friday, November 11 – Ethics and Society**

* Read: Dalai Lama, “Ethics and Society,” *Ethics for the New Millennium* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1999), 179-199.

**Week 10 - Finals**

**Monday, November 14 – Prep Day**

* No assigned readings; Mr. Prescott available to meet regarding final papers

**Tuesday, November 15 – Writing Workshop**

* No assigned readings

**Thursday, November 17 – Final Paper Due**

* Due: Final Paper

**Bibliography**

Barry, Ellen. “Young Rural Women in India Chase Big-City Dreams.” *The New York Times* (New York), September 24, 2016.

Bstan-‘dzin-rgya-mtsho, Dalai Lama XIV. *Ethics for the New Millennium*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1999.

Bays, Jan Chozen. *How to Train a Wild Elephant*. Boston; London: Shambhala, 2011.

Duran, Bonnie. “Mistaking a Stick for a Snake.” *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 44:1-2 (2016): 27-33.

Gutting, Gary. “What Would Krishna Do? Or Shiva? Or Vishnu?” *The New York Times* (New York), August 3, 2014.

Hanson, Rick and Richard Mendius. *Buddha’s Brain: The Practical Neuroscience of Happiness, Love, and Wisdom*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, 2009.

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Pinsky, Mark I. *The Gospel According to The Simpsons: The Spiritual Life of the World’s Most Animated Family*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.

Plato. *The Republic*. Trans. Benjamin Jowett. Campaign, IL: Project Gutenberg.

Owens, Rod. “Woman Hold My Hand.” *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 44:1-2 (2016): 19-26.

Polgreen, Lydia. “Scaling Caste Walls With Capitalism’s Ladders in India,” *The New York Times* (New York), December 21, 2011.

Raiche, Christopher. “#BlackLivesMatter and Living the Bodhisattva Vow.” *Harvard Divinity Bulleti* 44:1-2 (2016): 38-44.

Shukla, Aseem. “On Faith: The Theft of Yoga.” *Hindu American Foundation*, April 18, 2010.

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