



Religions of the World

Welcome to *Religions of the World*, a single semester course in comparative religion. Over the course of 18 lessons, students will explore the similarities and differences among religions around the world.

All religions throughout history have encompassed diverse expressions, beliefs, and practices, even within a single group. Just as Christian Protestant denominations (and there are thousands) differ from one another, there are many individual branches of Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and so on, each with their own unique expressions of spirituality.

Taking a comparative approach, *Religions of the World* explores this rich diversity of religious life. It begins by defining religion according to its role and purpose in human life. The course examines a variety of human religious responses within a cultural and historical context, including symbol, sacred text, myth, belief, and rituals. Students will survey the broad range of religious expressions from across the globe, from indigenous traditions to the world's major religions. The course concludes with a look at new religious movements and religion in the twenty-first century. Comparative essays and reflective writing guide students to synthesize course material and their own unique perspectives.

The following books are included in this course package:

Religions of the World syllabus (Oak Meadow, 2012)

Living Religions, 8th ed. (Prentice Hall, 2011)

Please note: There is no Teacher Manual available for this course.

Religions of the World Course Overview

Introduction	Overview, Study Aids and Strategies, Text, Blogging, Requirements
Lesson 1:	Religious Responses
Lesson 2:	Indigenous Religions
Lesson 3:	Hinduism and Jainism
Lesson 4:	Buddhism, Part I (to Chan and Zen)
Lesson 5:	Buddhism, Part II (Chan and Zen)
Lesson 6:	Daoism and Confucianism
Lesson 7:	Shinto
Lesson 8:	Midterm Paper
Lesson 9:	Bridge on Zoroastrianism Judaism (Earlier Periods) (to Judaism in the Middle Ages)
Lesson 10:	Judaism (Later Periods) (from Judaism in the Middle Ages to the end)
Lesson 11:	Christianity (Early Periods) (to the Protestant Reformation)
Lesson 12:	Christianity (Later Periods) (The Protestant Reformation)
Lesson 13:	Islam, Part I
Lesson 14:	Islam, Part II
Lesson 15:	Sikhism
Lesson 16:	New Religious Movements
Lesson 17:	Religion in the Twenty-first Century
Lesson 18:	Final Project

Religions of the World

Oak Meadow Sample Lesson

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Lesson



Hinduism and Jainism

Chapters 3 and 4

Introduction

In the introduction to this course, we made a plea to always think of religion in the plural (not just Buddhism, but Buddhism-s, Christianity-s, etc.). This way of thinking is especially fitting in the case of Hinduism, the oldest organized religion in the world in continuous practice. No Hindu dares to count the number of deities (gods and goddesses): many Hindus will say there are millions. Some say the numbers are infinite. What's more, they will say that new deities are coming into existence at every moment. Similarly, there is huge variety in the number of ways Hinduism is observed and practiced (*puja*). With Hinduism, think big, think limitless. The religion is simply too vast in scope to be captured in a single word like *Hinduism*. While the word is related to a Sanskrit word meaning "ocean," which at least makes us think "big," the term *Hinduism* itself is colonial British in origin and dates back only to the nineteenth century.

Traditionally, most Hindus are reluctant to draw strict boundaries around their beliefs. Some will even step outside Hinduism altogether and incorporate elements of other religions. Gandhi was heavily influenced by the Christian New Testament. Furthermore, he, like six million other residents of India (many of them also Hindus), observed another of India's home-grown religions: Jainism. Gandhi was especially influenced by Jainism's radical emphasis on doing no harm to other living creatures (including insects).

Note the symbol of Jainism on page 121 and Fisher's explanation on page 125. As you can see, the swastika (from a Sanskrit word roughly meaning "well-being") had been in existence long before the Nazis adopted it. It falls into a category of symbols we refer to as *mandalas*, symbols of wholeness or completion. The swastika is related to the cross and reminds

Chapters 3 & 4

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Hindus and Jains of their central belief in *samsara*, the cycle of life, death, and rebirth (Fisher 80). *Samsara* is a crucially central concept to Hinduism, Jainism, and—as we shall see in the next lesson—to Buddhism, which many have characterized as simply Hinduism reformed and updated by the man who came to be known to us as the Buddha. The most familiar symbol of *samsara* is the “wheel.”

The religions of East and South Asia are notoriously difficult for people from other parts of the world—especially Westerners—to grasp. Central to these religions is a radical sense of the unity and kinship of all reality: we are all one with other creatures and things and even one with the gods and goddesses themselves. As one of the main Hindu creeds (“beliefs”) puts it, *Tvat tvam asi* (“You are that!”): To grasp this idea, point to or think about anything around you and repeat to yourself the words, “You are that” (79). Even harder for most Westerners to accept, the Hindu belief that we are one with the gods and goddesses means that you and I are, like them, immortal.

There is another thing Westerners in particular find hard to grasp about Hindus. While Hindus believe we are one with everything that exists, they also believe that everything is in a constant state of flux (summed up in the Hindu concept of *samsara*, “transitory”). Since nothing is permanent, we must avoid desire, renounce attachment to anything or anyone else, and practice detachment as the means to happiness, well-being, and the avoidance of evil and suffering (this is an idea that will receive major emphasis in Buddhism as well). Ironically, then, to be happy is to be in a state of nonattachment to anything. As Hindus like to put it, “Renounce and then enjoy!” (from the Isa [Isha] Upanishad¹). Compare this to what the Christian writer says in the New Testament (1 Thessalonians 5:21): “Hold fast what is good.”

One of the most beloved of all sacred Hindu texts sums up what most Hindus believe this way:

From *The Shvetashvatara Upanishad*

4. The world is the wheel of God, turning round
And round with all living creatures upon its rim.

¹ The *Upanishads* are a vast collection of teachings passed on by Hindu gurus to their students. The word means roughly “sitting with a teacher.” In this way, they resemble class notes a student takes in school.

6. On this ever-revolving wheel of being
 The individual self goes round and round
 Through life after life, believing itself
 To be a separate creature, until
 It sees its identity with the Lord of Love
 And attains immortality in the indivisible whole.

Source: *The Upanishads*, trans. Eknath Easwaran. Tomales, CA: Nilgiri Press, 1987, 217-218.

Chapters 3 & 4

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Reading

Read Chapters 3 and 4, pages 73-134. Practice Active Reading (review the method as outlined in the introduction to the course). Before you begin reading, quickly look over the “Key Topics” as listed on the first page of the chapter and the timeline on page 76. Then, at the end of each chapter, read the “Key Terms,” “Review Questions,” and Discussion Questions.” You will be required to answer study questions (below) based on the reading

Along the Way

Chapter 3—Hinduism

1. Page 97—*Darsan* (pron: “dar-shan”), “visual contact with the divine”—The formal term for such an event is **theophany**, from a Greek expression meaning “manifestation of god.” In the *Bhagavad-Gita* (“Song of God”—see page 94 and below, 11:10–11:13), *Krishna*, the *avatar* (“one who is both human and divine,” or “the earthly incarnation of a deity”) permits the human warrior Arjuna to see him in his undiluted glory as the god Vishnu.
2. Page 110—Look up *ascetic* and be able to use this word as you encounter it in this and future lessons. Note how the word applies to Hindu *sadhus*. Note how it applies to the lifestyle of many Jains (see ahead, pages 128-129). The word has also been used to describe the six years of the Buddha’s life before he discovered “the Middle Way” (138) and the lives of Christian monastics (325ff).

Chapter 4—Jainism

Be able to explain the following chief Jain concepts: *ahimsa*, *aparigraha*, and *anekantwad*.

Chapters 3 & 4

(continued)



Questions

Write out each question and answer it in a complete sentence. When referring to the text, include page numbers.

1. How have Hindu beliefs reinforced the caste system throughout India's history? Who was the most famous opponent of the caste system in modern times and what specific changes did he propose?
2. Describe the effects of Hindu nationalism in recent Indian politics.
3. Why do you think Hindus revere the *Bhagavad-Gita* so? What are the main points of this sacred text?
4. Locate a complete version of the famous Jain story "The Blind Man and the Elephant" (referred to on page 128). What do you see as the moral, or point, of the story? Which of the three chief Jain values does it illustrate?
5. How might someone put the principle of *ahimsa* into practice in your own society? How would it affect the person's behavior? (134)

Choose One of the Following Projects:

Unless otherwise noted, write a one-to-two-page paper on your selected topic. Cite the source or sources you used as directed in the course introduction.

1. Choose one of the books in the "Suggested Reading" section at the end of one or the other of each chapter and skim it. Describe what you learned and what you think about it.
2. Explore one or more of the "Additional Internet Resources" at the end of each chapter. Describe what you learned and what you think about it.
3. Find a copy of the DVD "India: Empire of the Spirit" narrated by Michael Wood (from the Legacy series). What did you learn about Hinduism and about India itself?
4. Choose one of the following projects on the *yogas*:
 - Research one of the *yogas* referred to in the text and write a one-page summary describing the specific discipline a Hindu

practitioner follows. Begin with a sentence reviewing the purpose underlying every yoga.

- Draw or make a visual representation of the different yogas.

Enrolled Students: Send a picture of your artwork to your teacher.

- Construct and supervise a “Yoga Game” among your family members or friends. You will have to explain each of the following different yogas to your friends: *raja*, *jnana*, *karma*, and *bhakti*. Then divide the participants into two different groups. Assign yourself the role of emcee or moderator. Ask each group to assign every member of the other group a yoga based on members’ knowledge of that person: Which yoga is the best fit for each individual? Then, starting with one group, ask them to announce which yoga best fits each member of the other group and why, based on their knowledge of the yogas, they made that choice. In turn, each member of the other group is permitted to respond, either approving or disapproving the assignment of the yoga. You, the emcee, must decide which side presents the best argument and assign a point accordingly. In the end, the group with the most points based on correct assignments wins. Write a one-page response on the experience. How did members of the group react? What did you learn about the yogas and how they relate to personality traits?

5. Do a brief comparative study of two or more Hindu meditation techniques and explain how they fit with the concept of *yoga*.
6. Research the *Kumbha Mela* or some other Hindu festival. Ask yourself why these events draw so many to them (the *Kumbha Mela* routinely breaks the *Guinness Book of World Records* for largest numbers in attendance).
7. Research the life of Mohandas Gandhi. In what ways did he live out both Hindu and Jain ways of being religious? An excellent biography is Louis Fischer’s, *Gandhi: His Life and Message for the World*. New York: Mentor, 1954. Print.
8. Using the appropriate Hindu (Sanskrit) terms, write a one-page summary of the main Hindu beliefs and rituals.
9. Find an online or print version of the *Bhagavad-Gita*. Read the *darsan* (see above) in Chapter 11. Look up the physicist Robert

Chapters 3 & 4

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Oppenheimer, who was involved in the development of atomic weapons in the 1940s. Which line from this chapter did he recall as he watched the first atomic bomb test at Los Alamos in 1945? What do you think about this?

10. Locate an online or print version of the Hindu *Hymn on Creation* (from Book 10 of the *Rig Veda*²). Review the three theological positions discussed in the first lesson: *theism*, *atheism*, and *agnosticism*. Which of the three positions does the hymn come closest to expressing? What do you think about this?

11. If you can find one, visit a Hindu or Jain center near you and interview the head of the center or some other official. Alternatively, identify and interview an adherent of one or the other of these faiths. **TIP** When conducting interviews for studies such as this one, avoid asking directive questions (requiring simple yes-or-no answers, for example). Instead, practice nondirective questioning. This technique will elicit more information and will usually be freer from influence by the interviewer's biases or other interests. Examples of such questions include the following:

“Tell me about your religion.”

“What are your religious beliefs?”

“What religious practices do you observe?”

“What’s important for people outside your faith to know about you?”

“What do you look for or expect from the larger society you are a member of?”

Parting Thoughts

1. Does the idea of *samsara* (“all reality is transitory and in flux”) make good science?

Consider the following:

- Your skin replaces itself every two weeks.
- Your red blood cells replace themselves about every two months.

² The *Vedas* are the oldest of Hindu texts, dating at least as far back as 1500 BCE. The word *veda* means “hymn.” They were probably sung to accompany rituals like the “fire sacrifice.”

- Your skeleton replaces itself every seven years or so.
- New brain cells are being regenerated constantly to replace some kinds of neural tissue.

2. Does the immortality of *atman* make good science?

If you find the Hindu concept of immortality of the *atman* (“self”) intriguing, consider this: In 2001, Dr. William Haseltine, head of the Human Genome Sciences Company, said, “What distinguishes life from other forms of matter is that it is immortal—we are a 3.5 billion-year-old molecule...The fundamental property of DNA is its immortality” (qtd. in Wade).

FOR ENROLLED STUDENTS

Blog Work

If an online blog accompanies the course when you are taking it, you may be invited to contribute material on an extra-credit basis. Your teacher will be in touch by email about this if it applies to you.

Post a one-page summary of the project you chose from among those in the previous section.

Chapters 3 & 4

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Lesson

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Islam, Part I

Chapter 10



Mosque of Rustem Pasha, Istanbul

Introduction

Muslims are fond of saying that we human beings are not born sinful, but we are born forgetful. There is no original sin in Islam: Infants do not come into the world in a state of sin or separation from God, as Roman Catholic Christians believe (review the previous lesson and Fisher 339). But, because our memories are so short about some of the most important things in life—such as who we are as part of God’s creation and what our duties to God entail—Muslims believe we need to be *reminded* constantly about these things. The answer, Muslims say, is *dhikr* (pro-

Muslims are fond of saying that we human beings are not born sinful, but we are born forgetful.

nounced *zikr*): “remembrance,” in the form of prayer five times daily and in other acts of devotion as well. The Qur’an, Islam’s holy book, says in s.20:15 (the “s” stands for *surah* or “chapter”) that Adam, the first human being, occasionally forgot his promise to submit to God. The word *Qur’an* means “recitation” (also “reading”). It is by means of *recitation* that human beings *remember* who we are and what we should do: we were created by God, and God therefore is close to us, closer to us than our jugular veins, the Qur’an says in s.50:16 (Fisher 393). Our duty then, Muslims say, is

Chapter 10

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to *submit* (the literal meaning of the Arabic word *islam*): submit ourselves to God and obey God, and the word *Muslim* means “one who submits oneself to God.”

The four themes of *submission*, *remembrance*, *reminder*, and *recitation* run all through Islam. Muhammad did not see himself as introducing a new religion to humankind. He saw it as his duty simply to *remind* the two main monotheistic religions already in practice, which he knew very well (Judaism and Christianity), and the polytheistic religions that were also being practiced in the Arabian Peninsula, what true submission to God really means. Islam, Muhammad argued, was submission to Allah (“God”) in its purest form. For Muhammad, Adam (after some reminding) and Abraham and all the Prophets down through Jesus had been authentic Muslims: they had “submitted” themselves to God. All, as a result, occupy honored places in the Qur’an and elsewhere in Muslim tradition. The problems set in after them when human beings began to stray from the true faith and corruption of belief and practice set in.

Furthermore, Muslims believe that Muhammad’s reminder was God’s final word on the matter: for them, the Qur’an represents the last time God will speak to His creation, and Muhammad is the last Prophet God will send to us: he is, as Muslims say, *khatim an-nabieen*, “the Seal of the Prophets.” Islam to Muslims, then, is not so much a brand-new religion as an attempt to reform the already existing monotheistic faiths we have just studied in the previous four lessons.

One specific problem Muhammad hoped to overcome was that of human disunity bred largely of tribalism. A famous Muslim tale tells what happened when Muhammad arrived in Medina in the year 622 CE to form the first Muslim community, his famous *hijrah*, or “migration” from Mecca to Medina. The various rival clans all vied with one another over which would have the honor of becoming home to Muhammad’s first mosque. Quickly sensing the rivalry, Muhammad hit upon a way of settling the issue without showing favoritism to one group or the other. He let loose his camel and said that wherever the animal laid itself down to rest would become the site of the first mosque. And so, it was the camel who chose the site, not the Prophet. Sadly, as the often deadly rivalry between the two major sects of Islam—*Sunni* and *Shia*—demonstrates, the lesson was quickly forgotten.

Reading

Read Chapter 10, pages 381-410 bottom. Practice Active Reading (review the method as outlined in the introduction to the course). Before you begin reading, quickly look over the “Key Topics” as listed on the first page of the chapter and the timeline on page 382. Then at the end of the chapter, read the “Key Terms,” “Review Questions,” and “Discussion Questions.” You will be required to answer study questions (below) based on the reading.

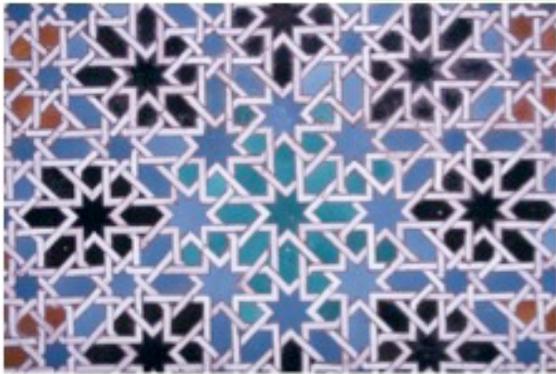
Chapter 10

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Along the Way

1. Page 381—The word in Arabic at the upper right is “Allah.” Allah is not a proper name. The word means “the God” or just “God.” “Allah” is also how Arabic-speaking Christians and Jews refer to God.
2. Page 383—Learn the terms *Hadith* (“Traditions,” the sayings of Muhammad as recorded and passed down by his followers) and *Sunna* (Muhammad’s words and deeds as a model for how Muslims should behave”) and begin using them in your written work.
3. Page 383—Note the very first word that came down to Muhammad from God: “Proclaim!” also translated “*Recite!*” The imperative verb form in Arabic is *iqra’* from which comes the noun *Qur’an*. The complete text of this first revelation became s.96 of the Qur’an. This is a good point to indicate that the revelations that came to Muhammad over the twenty-year period from about 610 to his death in 632 are not arranged in chronological order in the Qur’an.
4. Page 386—The “Constitution of Medina,” compiled shortly after Muhammad arrived in 622, is seen by Muslims as a pioneering model of respect for human dignity and human rights. The complete text can be found online.
5. Pages 389 and 393—The beautiful calligraphy you see on this page is a rendition of s.27:56 of the Qur’an. Orthodox (*Sunni*) Muslims, especially in the Arabian Peninsula, practice strict limitations on artistic representation: depictions of people and animals are forbidden because they are thought to constitute one of two major

Chapter 10

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Tiles, Alhambra Palace, Granada

sins, that of *shirk* (“idolatry”). The fear is that people will be drawn to venerate these depictions, perhaps even worship them, and thus stray from total devotion to the one God. Artistic energy and creativity are instead channeled into calligraphy and spectacular geometric forms.

Also on page 393, note the other major sin: *kufur* (“ungratefulness, unbelief, atheism”). The word originally meant to “cover up or conceal,” and was used to denote the act of covering up a Bedouin campfire in the desert.

6. Page 400—In Fisher’s description of the *hajj* (“pilgrimage”), note the ritual that takes place at the field (or plain) of *Arafat*. The word *arafat* means “recognized,” and Muslims believe this is the place where Adam and Eve, following a long separation, “recognized” one another and were reunited.

7. Pages 404-406—Muhammad left no clear instructions on what kind of leadership of Islam

should replace him after his death. As a result, the various clans within the Quraysh Tribe began quarreling. Abu Bakr emerged as “successor” or *Caliph* to Muhammad. One of his first acts as Caliph was to disinherit Ali (Muhammad’s cousin) and Ali’s wife Fatima (Muhammad’s daughter by his first wife Khadija) from the Prophet’s estate. From that point on, the Prophet’s family was to be supported only through alms. Abu Bakr, a member of the Qurayshi Banu (“sons of”) Taim clan, used his daughter Aisha’s status as the Prophet’s widow as a lever to shift power away from the clan of Muhammad and Ali, the Banu Hashim, a clan holding relatively minor status within the Quraysh tribe, back toward the more prestigious clans. Out of this power struggle between clans related to Muhammad grew Islam’s *fitna* (“civil strife”) and the split into *sunni* (“orthodox”—Abu Bakr’s side) and *shia* (“partisans” for Ali). For more on all of this, see Reza Aslan’s, *No god but God: The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam* (118 ff).

8. Page 407—Sufis are the mystics of Islam. Review expressions of religious mysticism in other world religions as encountered in previous lessons.

Lesson
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Questions

Chapter 10

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Write out each question and answer it in a complete sentence. When referring to the text, include page numbers.

1. In a sentence or two, describe what pre-Islamic Arabia was like.
2. Describe briefly the process by which Muhammad began receiving God's message.
3. When asked how best one could practice Islam, what was Muhammad's response? How does his response compare with what he says in his "Farewell Sermon"? In what ways did Muhammad practice what he preached in his personal life?
4. Which major Muslim values do you see illustrated in the interview with Dr. Syed M. Hussain?
5. Summarize the differences between Sunnis and Shiites in a few sentences.
6. What role does the Sufi concept *fana* ("annihilation") play in Sufi beliefs, and how does it compare with at least one other form of mysticism we have encountered?
7. What beliefs and prominent personalities are common to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam?

Choose One of the Following Projects:

Unless otherwise noted, write a one-to-two-page paper on your selected topic. Cite the source or sources you used as directed in the course introduction.

1. Choose one of the books in the "Suggested Reading" section at the end of the chapter and skim it. Describe what you learned and what you think about it.
2. Explore one or more of the "Additional Internet Resources" at the end of the chapter. Describe what you learned and what you think about it.
3. Research the role of Khadijah in Muhammad's life. What kind of person was she? Write a one-to-two-page response.

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4. Beginning with the box on page 398, look more deeply into the practice of Muslim prayer.
5. Research the *Shia* (also called *Shiites*), the largest minority sect in Islam.
6. Research *Sufism*, perhaps focusing on a prominent Sufi such as the Persian poet Rumi—in whose memory the Mevlevi Sufi order and the “whirling dervishes” were founded—or one of the most famous women in Sufi history, Rabi’a. Complete one of the following projects:
 - Write a page or two on Sufism or a prominent Sufi.
 - Illustrate a poem written by a Sufi including text as well as pictures. **Enrolled Students:** Take a picture or series of pictures to send to your teacher.



Rumi's Tomb, Konya, Turkey

FOR ENROLLED STUDENTS

Blog Work

If an online blog accompanies the course when you are taking it, you may be invited to contribute material on an extra-credit basis. Your teacher will be in touch by email about this if it applies to you.