



Diets and Deities: Food Themes in World Religions
Religious Studies 290A
DePauw University - Spring 2003
MWF 11:45-12:35 - JSMC A358

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Office Hours: MW 12:45 – 1:30
3:45 – 4:30
& by appointment

Institution: DePauw University, private liberal arts college

Course level and type: year 2-4/seminar

Hours of Instruction: 3hrs/week over a 14 week semester

Enrolment and year last taught: 20 students/spring 2003

Pedagogical Reflections: I'll do a few things differently next time I offer this class. For a start, it would work better as an advanced seminar for students who have some background in religious studies. A number of the students in the class lacked basic knowledge of world religions and did not do the suggested readings to give them that background. As a result, a good part of class time was spent covering such material (e.g., the Hindu pantheon, the different varieties of Christianity, etc.), which frustrated those students who did the reading or already knew such things. The course was taught as part of our "writing across the curriculum" program, so perhaps the problem was that a number of students took the class to fulfill their writing requirement, rather than out of a genuine interest in the subject. Some of the readings were a bit too advanced or did not seem to work well for one reason or another.

I've made extensive notes on the syllabus in double brackets [[--]] about specific readings that I'd change, readings and films that were particularly popular, and so on. On the whole, it was a great topic for a class; food was a wonderful "jumping off point" for discussing a wide range of issues: gender, class, human-divine relationships, the body, rituals, etc.

This course explores three related questions: (1) What are the types of and reasons for food prohibitions in world religions; (2) to what extent do the food practices of women (fasting, alms-giving, etc.) differ from those of men; and (3) how have religious traditions

used food and food symbolism to construct relationships between individuals, the community, and nonhuman beings (animals, deities, ancestors, etc.)?

In the course of answering these questions, we will familiarize ourselves with some of the myths, history, places, practices, and images associated with food from a variety of religious traditions. Approximately half the material is drawn from Asian religious traditions (mainly Hinduism and Buddhism, with some Jainism); for the most part, the rest comes from Judaism and Christianity. Course readings include a range of sources: myths, ethnographies, feminist theory, legal texts, histories, films, and ritual studies.

WARNING: There are no prerequisites, but students will need to familiarize themselves with many unfamiliar names, words and concepts.

Requirements

- (1) **Ten 1.5-2 page response essays (30%)**, due in Microsoft Word format via blackboard's dropbox function by 7 pm the day BEFORE the reading is assigned (Sunday evening for Monday's reading, etc.). Aside from this, you can arrange the due dates to suit your schedule and interests, as long as you turn in at least 5 before week 7. Essays are graded on a scale of 0-3 (0=no credit, 1=poor, 2=average, 3=good). These grades are determined by the quality of your analysis of the reading, the organization of the essay, and style. Further guidelines and/or suggestions will be posted on blackboard. Number your essays (essay #1, etc.) to ensure accurate recording of grades. Late essays will be accepted for half credit.

Essays should NOT be summaries of the reading, but should respond to the reading: do you agree? disagree? what is confusing? how does this relate to other things you have read or experienced? There are two alternatives for response essays on the readings: one, essays on any of the optional field trips; two, response essays on any of the films.

- (2) **Short Research Paper (5-7 pages; 30%)**. Papers may be rewritten; the grade for a rewritten paper is a weighted average of the original (10%) and the rewrite (90%). At least half of your sources must be print ones (books, articles), and at least three-fourths of your sources must be material NOT assigned for class. In other words: while you are free to use course materials for your paper, you must also do research, and while you are free to use internet resources, you must also use print ones.
- (3) **3 essay exams (30%)**. Two non-cumulative exams during the course of the semester and one cumulative final. Make-up exams must be scheduled at least a week in advance.
- (4) **Attendance and Participation (10%)**. Students are expected to attend class daily save for legitimate, documented excuses (serious illness or death in the immediate family). More than five absences will result in automatic failure for the course.

When final grades are calculated, students who demonstrate an active interest in and engagement with the course (i.e., who participated in class or otherwise demonstrated their enthusiasm) will have their grades rounded generously upward (so, for example, a student with an 88% will get an A-).

It is the assumption of this course and the university as a whole that people will behave in a responsible and ethical manner. This includes behaving respectfully towards others - classmates, instructors, the authors we read, and the people whose religious beliefs we are studying. Discussion and writing should be characterized by honesty, enthusiasm, critical thought, and respect for the lifestyles, worldviews, and beliefs of others. Note that 'critical thought' does not mean being nasty to or about other people, but evaluating their ideas and practices intelligently and with a spirit of collegiality and good will.

Special Needs: Students with special needs (physical challenges, learning disabilities, etc.) are welcome in this class. Please notify the University's ADA coordinator and your instructor in advance if you will need accommodations and/or auxiliary aids.

This class abides by DePauw University's Academic Integrity policy, described on pp. 85-90 of the *Student Handbook*. Cheating, plagiarism, and other types of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and can result in penalties ranging from failure on the assignment to expulsion from the University.

Required Books

Khare, R.S., ed. *The Eternal Food: Gastronomic Ideas and Experiences of the Hindus and Buddhists* State University of New York Press 1992. ISBN 0-7914-1058-7

[[On the whole, students found the amount of specialized vocabulary too daunting; I'm going to drop this book the next time I teach this class]]

Hattox, Ralph S. *Coffee and Coffeeshouses: The Origins of a Social Beverage in the Medieval Near East*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985.

[[Very popular with the students]]

Pearson, Anne Mackenzie. *"Because It Gives Me Peace of Mind": Ritual Fasts in the Religious Lives of Hindu Women*. SUNY 1996. ISBN 0791430383

[[Very popular with the students]]

Sack, Daniel. *Whitebread Protestants: Food and Religion in American Culture*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2001. ISBN: 0312294425

[[Very popular with the students]]

Electronic resources - *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* [JAAR] 63, 3 (Fall 1995). (available via EBSCO Host, ATLAS Full Text Plus; go to the resources page on the library website, then "all databases," then scroll down to select ATLA/ATLAS).

Essays on Blackboard, ATLAS, or jstor.org.

- Achaya, K.T. *Indian Food: A Historical Companion*, 53-72. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Bynum, Caroline Walker. "Fast, Feast, and Flesh: The Religious Significance of Food for Medieval Women." *Representations* 11 (Summer 1985). {jstor.org/linked on blackboard}
- Doniger, Wendy, with Brian K. Smith, trans. *The Laws of Manu*, xv-xviii, xxii-xl, 93-95, 99-105. London and New York: Penguin, 1990. {blackboard}
- Dodson, Jualynne E. and Cheryl Townsend Gilkes. "There's Nothing Like Church Food: Food and the U.S. Afro-Christian Tradition: Re-Membering Community and Feeding the Embodied S/spirit(s)." *JAAR* 63, 3 (Fall 1995): 519-38. {ATLAS}
- Douglas, Mary. "The Abominations of Leviticus." In *Reader in Comparative Religion*, ed. William Lessa and E. Vogt, 202-205. New York: Harper and Row, 1972. {blackboard}
- Douglas, Mary. *Leviticus as Literature*, v-viii, 134-59, 174-5. Oxford University Press, 2000. {blackboard}
- Dugan, Kathleen. "Fasting for Life: The Place of Fasting in the Christian Tradition." *JAAR* 63, 3 (Fall 1995): 539-548. {ATLAS}
- Erndl, Kathleen. *Victory to the Mother*. (Chapter on Santoshi Ma) {blackboard}
- Francis, H.T. "Mahasutasoma Jataka." In *The Jataka: Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*, vol. V, 246-79. Edited by E.B. Cowell. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1990. {blackboard}
- Fuller, Robert C. "Wine, Symbolic Boundary Setting, and American Religious Communities." *JAAR* 63, 3 (Fall 1995): 497-518 {ATLAS}
- Glatzer, Nahum N., ed. and trans. *The Passover Haggadah with English translation, introduction, and commentary based on the commentaries of E. D. Goldschmidt*, x-xv, 5-11, 17, 19-55. 3rd rev. ed. New York: Schocken Books, 1979. {blackboard}
- Gold, Ann Grodzins. "Grains of Truth: Shifting Hierarchies of Food and Grace in Three Rajasthani Tales." *History of Religions* (1998): 150-71. {blackboard}
- Harris, Marvin. "The Abominable Pig." In *Food and Culture: A Reader*, edited by Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik, 67-79. New York: Routledge, 1997. {blackboard}
- Isaac, Ephraim. "Significance of Food in Hebraic-African Thought and the Role of Fasting in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church." In *Asceticism*, edited by Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis, 329-42. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995. {blackboard}
- Laidlaw, James. Pages 1-3, 153-72, 216-29, and 289-93 in *Riches and Renunciation: Religion, Economy, and Society among the Jains*. New York: Oxford University Press, Clarendon Press, 1995. {blackboard}

- Levi-Strauss, Claude. "The Culinary Triangle." In *Food and Culture: A Reader*, edited by Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik, 28-35. New York: Routledge, 1997. {blackboard}
- Miles, Margaret . "Religion and Food: The Case of Eating Disorders" *JAAR* 63, 3 (Fall 1995): 549-564. {ATLAS}
- Neusner, Jacob. "Jewish Ways of Being Religious: An Overview." In Gary Kessler, *Ways of Being Religious*, 343-53. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing, 2000. {blackboard}
- Peters, F.E. "26. The Dietary Laws," "27. From Torah to Code," "28. Jesus and the Dietary Laws," "29. Clean and Unclean in the Christian Conscience," and "30. The Quran and the Prophet on Dietary Laws," pp. 249-60 in *Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. {blackboard}
- Roof, Wade Clark. "Blood in the Barbecue? Food and Faith in the American South." In *God in the Details : American Religion in Popular Culture*, edited by Eric Michael Mazur and Kate McCarthy, 109-21. {blackboard}
- Shanta, N. *The Unknown Pilgrims. The Voice of the Sadhvis: The History, Spirituality and Life of the Jaina Women Ascetics*, 496-509, 597-600, 609-16. Translated by Mary Rogers and with a Presentation by Raimon Panikkar. {blackboard}
- Shulman, David Dean. *The Hungry God: Hindu Tales of Filicide and Devotion*, 18-47. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press. {blackboard}
- Smart, Ninian. "South Asia." In *The World's Religions*, 43-105. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. {blackboard}
- Soler, Jean. "The Semiotics of Food in the Bible." In *Food and Culture: A Reader*, edited by Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik, 55-66. New York: Routledge, 1997. {blackboard}
- Wright, Wendy. "Babette's Feast: A Religious Film" *Journal of Religion and Film* 1, no. 2 (1997). <<http://www.unomaha.edu/~wwwjrf/wrightar.htm>>

Schedule of Classes and Assignments

(Items marked with an asterisk are available on-line, via blackboard unless otherwise indicated.)

PART ONE: FOOD IN RITUALS

This section explored the question of how religious traditions used food rituals to construct relationships between individuals, the community, and nonhuman beings (animals, deities, ancestors, etc.). We spent a fair amount of time discussing the social implications of rituals – who was doing them, who was unable to, and how food rituals served to create hierarchy or challenge it.

1. Introduction and Background

- 1/27 (M) No class. Read over the syllabus and make a note of any questions or concerns. I WILL ASSUME YOU READ THE SYLLABUS; ignorance of its provisions will not serve as an excuse.
- 1/29 (W) Sack, 1-7 and chapter 1
Recommended if you want some background information on Christianity and Christian denominations: Browse through the following (all websites listed on the syllabus can also be found as links under the 'external links' section of blackboard)
"A Very Brief Overview of Christianity"
http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr_intr.htm
"Comparing Roman Catholicism and Conservative Protestantism"
http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr_capr.htm
"Families of Christian Denominations"
http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr_divi.htm
- 1/31 (F) Background material on Hinduism: *Smart, *The World's Religions*, Ch. 2, 43-68 (in 2 files in blackboard; make sure you read these pages).

2. Background on South Asian Religions & Foods; Food in Hindu Ritual

- 2/3 (M) *Smart, *The World's Religions*, Ch. 2, 68-105 (in 2 files in blackboard)
[[ended up that few people read Smart and so not much point; a few complaints at all the vocabulary..]]
- 2/5 (W) Khare, *Eternal Food*, introduction, 1-9 and 16-18; *Acharya, *Indian Food: A Historical Companion*, 53-72
[[Khare's too complicated for undergrads without any background in Hinduism; change]]
- 2/7 (F) Focus on writing: Read the following 4 websites (links to all assigned websites are available via the 'External Links' section of blackboard)
"How to Read an Assignment"
<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/readassign.html>
"Choosing a Subject"
<http://www.powa.org/whtfrms.htm>
"Writing for Religious Studies"
http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/religious_studies.html
"Tips on Essay Exams"
<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/essay-exams.html>

3. Food in Hindu Ritual

- 2/10 (M) *Fuller, "Sacrifice" [[Next time, include puja chapter too]] film: *Puja*
[[Very good; I would also consider showing *Sitala in Spring* or *Altar of Fire* here, but my university doesn't own either]]
- 2/12 (W) Khare in *Eternal Food*, "Food with Saints," 27-43 [[too complicated]]
Aklujkar in *Eternal Food*, "Sharing the Divine Feast" 95-109 [[ok]]

- 2/14 (F) Toomey in *Eternal Food*, “Mountain of Food,” 117-138; [[good]]
 Moreno in *Eternal Food*, “Pancamirtam,” 147-70; [[complicated]]

Saturday field trip: Udupi Café, an Indian vegetarian restaurant in Indianapolis (leaving Greencastle at 11 am, returning by 2 or 3. There is an Indian grocery store and music/video store next door that we could visit as well, if people are interested)

[[surprisingly few students showed up, but those who did really appreciated it.]]

Note on field trips: all field trips are optional. Your meals will be paid for by the university. You may write a response essay about any of the field trips. For the dining trips, the essay should be a model restaurant review that discusses the cultural and religious aspects of the trip; in other words, relate the trip to the course.

4. Rituals of Western Religions: Seder to Communion/Eucharist

- 2/17 (M) *Glatzer, *Passover Haggadah*
 recommended if you don't know anything about Judaism:
 *Neusner, “Jewish Ways of Being Religious”
- 2/19 (W) *Catechism, section 2, chapter 1, article 3, paragraphs 1322-1419
 <http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p2s2c1a3.htm
 recommended if you don't know anything about Catholicism:
 See listings above, under 1/29/03
- 2/21 (F) [[Find a more general reading on different ways of viewing Eucharist in different Xn traditions; reading the primary source right away was a bit challenging]]

Sunday field trip: visit to a Catholic church. Details TBA

PART TWO: TO EAT OR NOT TO EAT: Food Prohibitions and Practices

5. Food Prohibitions in South Asian Traditions

- 2/24 (M) *Doniger and Smith trans, *Laws of Manu*, xv-xvii, xxii-xl, 93-95, 99-105
 [[People really enjoyed this, and found the introduction very helpful]]
- 2/26 (W) *Harvey, *Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, Ch. 4 [[Mixed reactions: some seemed to really appreciate this; others never quite managed to keep Theravada and Mahayana views distinct. Maybe add another reading?]]
- 2/28 (F) *Francis, trans., “Mahasutasoma Jataka” [[In the future, include some vinaya rules on food, too. Ideally, retranslate Jataka so readable; the story is great, but the 19th century verse and prose was a bit off-putting to the students]]

6. Food Prohibitions (& Practices) in the Jain Tradition

3/3 (M) *Laidlaw, *Riches and Renunciation*, Introduction and section on ahimsa, 1-3, 153-72. [[Very good. Maybe read more from this book, the section on giving alms for example. The drawback: people obsess about the boiled water thing, to the point where I found discussion tedious. Could also use parts of *Absent Lord* or Humphrey and Lord on Jain puja.]]

Film: *Frontiers of Peace* [[fast forwarded past the lingering shots on dying animals, which I know from previous experience tends to overpower everything else in the film, even if students are warned in advance]]

3/5 (W) *Laidlaw, *Riches*, Fasting and Exchange 216-29, 289-93

3/7 (F) **RESEARCH PAPER PROPOSAL DUE**

*Shanta, *The Unknown Pilgrims*, 496-509, 597-600, 609-16
[[Good; might work better next to fasting section with Hinduism and/or Christianity. Students found the topic of fasting fascinating, and I had half a dozen research papers on anorexia compared or contrasted to fasting in Jainism, Christianity, etc.]]

7. An Interlude of Western Religions: Dietary Laws in Judaism

3/10 (M) *Peters, pp. 249-60 in *Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*
[[Good, but need some background on Judaism and Islam (provided in lecture). A secondary reading on kosher, sacrifice, and/or on early Christian views of the dietary laws, would be good to add.]]

3/12 (W) *Douglas, “The Abominations of Leviticus” and *Leviticus as Literature*
rec: *Soler, “Semiotics of Food in the Bible” & *Harris, “Abominable Pig.”
[[Students had an extremely hard time with Douglas, although some of that, I suspect, is due to the time of the semester. We ended up going through it page by page in class, until students were heartily sick of it. A few really liked Harris.]]

3/14 (F) Focus on writing.
“Effective Academic Writing: The Argument”
<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/argument.html>
“Constructing Thesis Statements”
<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/thesis.html>
“Developing Your Thesis”
http://www.dartmouth.edu/%7Ecompose/student/ac_paper/develop.html
Recommended: “Procrastination”
<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/procrastination.html>

Potential Saturday field trip: trip to an Ethiopian restaurant (in preparation for next Wednesday’s reading).

8. Feasting and Fasting in Christian Traditions

- 3/17 (M) *Bynum, “Feast, Fast” {blackboard/jstor.org}; *Dugan, “Fasting for Life” and *Miles, “Religion and Food” {JAAR in ATLAS};
[[Bynum was great, but should be assigned earlier; perhaps even have students read *Holy Feast?* Dugan and Miles did not work so well; I’ll drop them next time]]
- 3/17, 6pm film: *Babbette's Feast* (room TBA); [[Students really enjoyed the film]]
- 3/19 (W) *Wright, “Babette's Feast: A Religious Film”
- 3/21 (F) *Isaac, “Significance of Food in Hebraic-African Thought and the Role of Fasting in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church” [[A fascinating topic, although I might try to find a different reading on the subject. I discovered on the exam, too, that several students did not really understand the difference between the major branches of Christianity]]

spring break, 3/22 - 30

PART THREE: MYTH AND SYMBOL

9. Hindu Food Myths

- 3/31 (M) *Shulman, 18-47 in *Hungry God*; *Gold, “Grains of Truth” in *History of Religions* 1998; White in *Eternal Food*, “You are What You Eat”
[[Somehow, the amount of mythology that ended up being assigned was less than I originally intended, so the Hindu material got stranded without a ‘conversation partner’ from other world religions. Next time, either drop this or include more myths, perhaps Native American? People enjoyed the Shulman reading]]
- 4/2 (W) Focus on writing. Reading TBA.

4/4 (F) **exam**

10. Food Symbolism

- 4/7 (M) Ramanujan in *Eternal Food*, “Food for Thought,” 221-49
- 4/9 (W) *Levi-Strauss, “The Culinary Triangle” [[A challenging reading, but we managed to get through it; worth keeping, I think, despite the difficulty the students had]]
- 4/11 (F) **RESEARCH PAPER DUE**

PART FOUR: FOOD, DRINKS, AND COMMUNITY

11. Fasting and Gendered Relationships to Food

- 4/14 (M) *Because it Gives Me Peace of Mind*, 1-44, 78-84
[[This would work better with the other stuff on fasting, Shanta and Bynum e.g.; perhaps move it above?]]
- 4/16 (W) *Because it Gives Me Peace of Mind*, 105-69, *Erndl, *Victory*
7:30 pm: *Jai Santoshi Ma* (room TBA)
[[People loved this movie, although they found the song and dance routines a bit tedious. One commented that he wished he had watched it earlier in the semester, as it gave him a much better sense of food and Hinduism. I had them rewrite the script for a different religious group – Jain, Christian, etc. – and that worked quite well as an assignment. After the semester was over, I discovered two readings on the film that I will include next time: Phil Lutgendorf, “A Superhit Goddess” and “A ‘Made to Satisfaction Goddess’”, both available online <<http://free.freespeech.org/manushi/131/maa1.html>> and <<http://free.freespeech.org/manushi/131/maa2.html>>]]
- 4/17 Passover. Fieldtrip: participate in seder (time and place TBA; or a CyberSeder at <http://www.emanuelnyc.org/>)
- 4/18 (F) *Because it Gives Me Peace of Mind*, 171-221

12. Forbidden Drinks in Sociological Perspective

- 4/21 (M) Hattox, *Coffee and Coffeeshouses*, ch. 1-3
Recommended if you don't know anything about Islam:
http://www.cqpress.com/context/articles/epr_islam.html
[[Students found the first few chapters slow, but really enjoyed the later ones. We did a ‘mock trial’ on whether or not coffee should be banned, complete with expert witnesses. This was a big hit, and students retained the basic issues much better afterwards.]]
- 4/23 (W) Hattox, *Coffee and Coffeeshouses*, ch. 4-5
- 4/25 (F) Hattox, *Coffee and Coffeeshouses*, ch. 6, 8 (7 is recommended)

13. Food, Society, and Religion in Protestant America

- 4/28 (M) *Fuller, “Wine, Symbolic Boundary Setting” {JAAR}; re-read Sack, Ch. 1
[[A good article, has a nice theoretical component (Turner) plus fun examples of alternative religious groups.]]
- 4/30 (W) Sack, chapter 2, “Social Food: Potlucks and Coffee Hours”; *Roof, “Blood in the Barbeque?”
[[Both good]]
- 5/2 (F) *Dodson and Gilkes, “There's Nothing Like Church Food” {JAAR}
[[OK]]

14. Concluding Reflections

5/5 (M) Sack, ch. 3-4

5/7 (W) TBA