

# Religion 289: Abrahamic Faiths

Spring 2006

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Class time: Section A: TTh 8:30-9:45, Kirby 02  
Section B: TTh 11-12:15, Kirby 02

## Class Description:

This class will introduce students to the three religious traditions that trace their heritage to Abraham: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The course has the following learning goals (as defined by the Religion program):

**Historical Knowledge:** students will become familiar with the basic history of the three religions and especially with their interactions in Jerusalem.

**Literature:** students will gain a basic familiarity with representative samples from the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, the Qur'an, and several important non-scriptural documents (such as the Mishnah, the writings of the church fathers, and *hadith* literature).

**Breadth and Diversity:** by studying the texts, observing people practicing these religions, and experiencing aspects of these religions, we will learn about their diverse practices and beliefs.

**Questions of Religious Traditions:** we will be studying the way the three religions answer the same questions: What is scripture? How should people relate to God? What does God want of humans?

Additionally, just as learning a foreign language helps you understand your native tongue better, so studying different religions helps you understand your own tradition. This class will offer students the opportunity to reflect on their own traditions by studying different ways of understanding the divine and how humans relate to it.

## Affirmation of Community Responsibility

The course will emphasize the values found in Illinois College's Affirmation of Community Responsibility. For this class, the most important values are those *tolerance* and *respect*. All the religions we will study have many adherents who find their religion to be "right." Since the debate about which religion (if any) is "right" cannot be answered objectively and definitely, this class will not engage in it. Rather, we will see how they address similar issues and concerns for their adherents.

Students who do not subscribe to the IC Affirmation of Community Responsibility should drop the class immediately.

## Requirements:

### 1. Attendance:

Attendance at all class sessions is expected, unless you have an excused absence (described below). ***You may skip (that is, have an unexcused absence) one week of classes during the semester without affecting your grade. Every additional unexcused absence will lower your final grade by 5%.***

### 2. Journal:<sup>1</sup>

You will keep a journal in which you will record reflections and reactions to the readings and the learning experiments. You should keep your journal up-to-date, because during our class meetings we will frequently read from the journals in class and use your comments as a launching point for discussion.

I have created a reading guide for Armstrong's *Jerusalem*, which includes questions you are required to discuss in your journal.

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<sup>1</sup> The inspiration for journaling and doing learning experiments comes from Dr. Sidney Brown of Sewanee University. Dr. Brown kindly provided me her journal assignments, which form the basis for those in this class.

For more information about journals (including how they will be assessed), see page 8.

### 3. Learning Experiments

For each religion, we will have a week-long learning experiment (for more on this, see page 11). Your reactions to these experiments will be recorded in your journal.

### 4. Field Trips

The class will have field trips to a synagogue, an Orthodox church, and a mosque. You are required to visit these sites with the class. If you are a student athlete, you will be excused from team activities on the following dates (I have already notified the athletic director of these requirements and dates). The dates and times are as follows:

Temple Israel, on Saturday, Feb 18 (8 am - 1 pm)

The Greek Orthodox church on Sunday, Mar 26 (8 am - 1 pm)

Springfield Islamic Center on Friday, Apr 21 (12 noon - 3 pm)

More information on the field trips (including locations, contact information, and dress-code guidelines) will be distributed later.

### 5. Jerusalem Peace Conference Simulation

Students are required to participate in the Jerusalem peace conference simulation. This will take place in class on May 2 and 4. To prepare for this, students will write a "position paper" describing their country's position on the situation in the Holy Land.

### 6. Final Paper

In lieu of a final exam, students will write a paper about the issues discussed in the course. This will be due on the date the final exam is scheduled.

### 7. Creative Project

You will do a creative project (collage, illustration, etc.) illustrating / comparing one or more of the religions studied in this class. On the last day of class, you will share these with each other. More information on this will be distributed later in the semester.

### 8. E-mail

You are required to check their IC email account regularly. Alternately, you can set their IC account to forward their mail to a different address (see web site for instructions on how to do this).

If I need to contact the class, I will send announcements via IC email. Failure to check your email will not be considered a legitimate excuse for failing to read these messages.

### **Evaluation:**

Your final grade will be earned as follows:

Journal: 40%

Position paper: 20%

Final paper: 20%

Creative project: 10%

Participation and Preparation: 10%

**Attendance and Late Paper Policy:** As noted in the "Requirements" section above, attendance at all classes is expected. There are only four types of absences that will be considered excusable:

Unexpected absences

? *unexpected* hospitalization

? bereavement due to the death of an immediate family member

You will need to show documentation for this category of absences. For the former, a note/letter from your doctor explaining the circumstances of your admission; for the latter, a death certificate or obituary. For these two types of absences, you will be allowed to makeup quizzes and/or exams and I will consider granting an extension to turn in work late. “Unexpected” doesn’t include dental checkups, physical exams, plastic surgery procedures, etc., that you scheduled during class time – if you have scheduled it, it is, by definition, not “unexpected.”

Anticipated absences

? participation in activities for another class

? participation on a varsity sport team

If you plan to miss class for one of these reasons, **you must notify me via e-mail as early in the semester as possible. You need to tell me what class or team is requiring your absence and list the date(s) that you will not be present in class.**

You will be given the opportunity to make-up quizzes and/or exams, but **you will expected to turn in papers and/or other material ahead of time** or make provision to have one of your classmates turn it in for you.

All other absences, for whatever reason (personal trips, work for other classes, a hot date, eel infestation, *et cetera*) will not be excused and you will not be able to make-up the quizzes and/or exams.

### IC Honor Code

Students are expected to uphold the Academic Integrity Oath:

As a member of the Illinois College academic community, I agree to preserve the honor and integrity of this institution by always seeking to behave honestly and fairly. I will only present work that is my own and I will never damage the bond of trust that the Illinois College community values. I promise to be truthful at all times in my academic journey and I will accept the consequences of my offenses, as outlined in the Honor Code Statement.

Students I suspect of plagiarizing papers or cheating on exams will be referred to the Honor Board with the strong recommendation they receive a failing (F) grade for the semester.

### Reading Material:

You are required to purchase the following materials for this class:

Armstrong, *Jerusalem*. This non-scholarly (popular) book provides basic introductions to the three religions, their doctrines, beliefs, etc. She focuses on the relations of the three traditions in Jerusalem and thus provides the background for our Jerusalem Peace Conference.

Marks, *Judaism for the Non-Jew*

Garvey, *Orthodox for the Non-Orthodox*

Sardar & Davies, *The No-nonsense guide to Islam*

These three books are written by adherents to the different traditions for an audience of people from other traditions.

A subscription to the *New York Times*. An important part of this class is your knowledge and understanding of current events in the United States and the Near East. The best coverage of these events is the *NYT*, so you will need to get a subscription to the newspaper for the course of the semester.

### Calendar

All readings are required, except for those with pound signs (#). These are optional.

#### Jan

17 Introductory Comments, Syllabus, etc.

Movie: *Jerusalem, Behind These Walls*

19 Armstrong: Introduction. Answer the question on the “Reading Guide.”

Exodus 12:43-49.

Read these six verses. What questions do you have about them? Write down at least three questions you have about these verses in your journal and be prepared to share them with the class.

## Judaism

- 24 Armstrong 1: Zion & 2: Israel. Answer the questions on the “Reading Guide.”

### Scripture

Exodus 5:1-2

OLR: Midrash Halakhah.

Are the questions/issues raised by the rabbis similar to the ones you identified for Ex 12:43-49?

OLR: Midrash Aggadah.

What was the rabbinic attitude towards the Bible? Do they read the text literally?

- 26 **Beliefs**

Marks, Ch 2: Beliefs and Values, Ch 10: Medical Ethics

OLR: Shema.

What is the main topic in these passages? Why would the rabbis want them be repeated three times per day?

OLR: Maimonides, 13 principles of faith.

Are any of these “principles” surprising to you? Which ones? Why?

- 31 Armstrong 3: City of David & 4: City of Judah. Answer the questions on the “Reading Guide.”

# Pss. 74: 12-17, 89:5-13, 104:1-13, 24-26 (these are the psalms KA is referring to in her text)

### Life Rites

Marks, chapter 8

Gen 17.

Why do Jews practice circumcision?

OLR: Ketubas (3 of them).

What common iconographic elements are found in these pictures?

OLR: Ketuba text (English).

How important is “romance” to the Ketuba? What is the objective of the document?

OLR: Mourner’s Blessing.

Relatives of the deceased recite this blessing for a year after death. How much attention is paid to the deceased in this blessing? What is being blessed?

## Feb

- 2 **Practices:** Marks, Ch 5: Sabbath; Ch 7: Dietary Laws

OLR: Shabbat.

OLR: Kashrut.

### Beginning of “Jewish Learning Experiment” Week

Come to class prepared to discuss:

(1) how you will observe Shabbat -- what is “work” for you? What will you refrain from doing on your “Shabbat?”

(2) how you will alter your diet during this experiment.

- 7 Armstrong 5: Exile and Return & 6: Antioch in Judah. Answer the questions on the “Reading Guide.”

### Women

Marks, Chapter 9: Women

OLR: Women in Judaism

OLR: Women in Traditional Judaism

OLR: Jewish Feminism

Do you think it is accurate to say that Judaism “discriminates” against women? Why or why not? In what ways do you think American society discriminates against (or at least undervalues) women engaged in traditional female roles?

- 9 Discussion of “Jewish Learning Experiment”

- 14 No Class b/c field trip to synagogue

16 **Liturgy**

Marks, chapter 3: Prayer; Ch 6: Feasts, Fasts, Festivals

OLR: Liturgy

OLR: Siddur Selections.

As you read the Siddur, pay attention to Marks, pp. 66-78. Find each of the three sections of the prayer service that Marks identifies in the Siddur. Can you discern an over-arching theme or logic to the service? Hint: it helps to write down an outline of the service to identify themes and logic.

18 **Saturday: Field trip to Temple Israel**

21 Armstrong 7: Destruction & 8: Aelia Capitolina. Answer the questions on the “Reading Guide.”

Discussion of Synagogue Field Trip

## **Christianity**

23 **Scripture**

OLR: Origin, First Principles (selections)

OLR: Biblical Literalism

According to the “Literalism” article, there are “figures of speech” in the Bible. How can we identify them? If a biblical author wrote something that reflected their understanding of the world (for example, they thought the earth was flat and had corners {Rev 7:1}), are we supposed to understand this as a “figure of speech” or read it literally?

Why does Origin object to “literal” interpretations of the Bible? Do you think his criticism is appropriate or not? How does Origin’s interpretative methodology compare to that of the Rabbis?

28 Armstrong 9: The New Jerusalem & 10: Christian Holy City. Answer the questions on the “Reading Guide.”

### **Beliefs**

Garvey, Chapters 1-4

OLR: Nicene Creed

How were decisions made in the early church? What sorts of issues prompted church councils? How does the Nicene creed reflect the results of the council decisions?

What do the Orthodox mean by “Deification?” How does it relate to the conception of original sin?

## **Mar**

2 **Practices**

### **Beginning of “Christian Learning Experiment” week**

Garvey, Chapter 7

OLR: Didache

OLR: Fasting, Baptism, Prayer

OLR: Lent

How old are these customs? How do they compare to Jewish practices?

Come to class prepared to discuss:

(1) What will you give up for “lent”? Why have you decided to abstain from it? How is it important or significant for you?

(2) How you will alter your diet during this experiment.

7 Armstrong 11: Bayt al-Maqdis & 12: Al-Quds. Answer the questions on the “Reading Guide.”

### **Life Rites**

Garvey, Chapter 7

OLR: Presentation of Mother and Child

How do the birth rituals of the Orthodox compare to those of the Jews?

OLR: Death Customs, Memorial Service,

How do the death rites / customs of the Orthodox compare to those of the Jews?

OLR: Marriage Rite, Betrothal Service

Are there any common features between the “The Service of Betrothal” and the text of the Ketuba?

9 Discussion of Christian Learning Experiment

Journals to be submitted for mid-term evaluation.

14-16 Spring Break

21 No Class b/c of field trip 3/26

23 **Liturgy**

OLR: Orthodox Liturgy.

What is the structure / organizational rationale for the Orthodox Liturgy?

What is important or stressed in the liturgy?

How does it compare in structure or meaning / intention to the Jewish liturgy we studied?

26 **Sunday: Field Trip to St. Anthony's Hellenic Church**

28 Armstrong 13: Crusade & 14: Jihad. Answer the questions on the "Reading Guide."

Discussion of Field Trip to Hellenic Church

30 Mysticism (all traditions)

OLR: All the materials

In all three religious traditions, one can discern at least two major ways of "doing" religion: the priestly/liturgical mode and the mystical mode. When you read through the mysticism texts, what do they emphasize? How are J, C, I mystics similar to each other? How are they different from the priestly/liturgical models we have studied thus far?

## **Islam**

**Apr**

4 Armstrong 15: Ottoman City & 16: Revival. Answer the questions on the "Reading Guide."

**Scripture**

Sardar & Davies, Chapter 1,

Luke 1:1-2:19

OLR: Sura 19, "Maryam" (= "Mary")

OLR: Sura 112, "Al-Ikhlās" (= "The Unity")

OLR: Gatje, The Qu'ran and its Exegesis

Read Luke and Suras 19 and 112. How is the Qu'ranic presentation of the birth of Jesus different from the Christian version?

How do the commentaries of Baiḍāwī and Zamakshari compare to those of Origen or the Rabbis?

6 **Practices**

**Beginning of "Muslim Learning Experiment" week**

Sardar & Davies, Chapter 2

OLR: Zakat

OLR: Halal

OLR: Salat

(Notice, when reading/viewing the Salat flash presentation, how different hadith are noted at the bottom of the slides.)

Come to class prepared to describe what you will do for the "Muslim Learning Experiment."

- 11 Armstrong 17: Israel & 18: Zion? Answer the questions on the “Reading Guide.”

**Beliefs**

Sardar & Davies, Chapter 5, 6

OLR: Sura 1

Why would the Qu’ran start with Sura 1? What is stressed or important about this sura?

OLR: Malcolm X

How did the Hajj affect Malcolm X’s world view?

OLR: Attributes of God

How do the Attributes of God in Islam resemble or differ from those in Judaism or Christianity?

- 13 Discussion of Muslim Learning Experiment

14-17 Easter Break

- 18 No class b/c field trip on Friday

- 20 **Liturgy**

OLR: Salat

Islam doesn’t really have a “liturgy” the way Judaism or Christianity do. Study the Salat presentation (again) and pay special attention to the text of the prayers. These are repeated many, many times by Muslims -- why? How do they relate to Islamic beliefs?

OLR: Ablution

Read/view this presentation; both these topics are in preparation for our field trip to the mosque on Friday.

**Life Rites**

OLR: Islamic Life Cycle Rites

OLR: Islam in Turkey

How are Islamic life cycle rites similar to those practiced by Judaism and Christianity?

- 21 **Friday: Field Trip to Springfield Islamic Society**

- 25 Discussion of Field Trip to Mosque

- 27 **Women & Modernity**

Sardar & Davies, Chapter 7-9

What do these authors see as the challenges facing Islam today?

Do you think there is hostility between Islam and the West? If so, to what do you attribute it?

OLR: Women in Islam

Do you think it is accurate to say that Islam “discriminates” against women? Why or why not? Does Islam treat women more poorly than Judaism or Christianity? (Be sure, in answering this question, to distinguish between Islamic law and regional and/or temporal customs.)

**May**

- 2 Peace conference position papers due.

Peace Conference, Day 1.

- 4 Peace Conference, Day 2.

- 9 Creative Project Presentations

## Journal Assignment

Your journal is a cross between a diary and an academic notebook. Like a diary, it is written in the first person (“I”) and records your personal thoughts, responses, and impressions of the materials read, viewed, experienced, and discussed in class. Like an academic notebook, it can help you review for class discussions, your final paper, and other class projects. There are no correct or incorrect journal entries; rather, you are seeking to understand yourself, your tradition, and the course material better.

### Why journal?

It is a cliché that writing helps clarify thinking. It is also true. The struggle of taking notes and summarizing other people’s thoughts (as you should do regularly in academic notebooks) helps you understand those other concepts. Similarly, writing down your own thoughts and reactions will help clarify your thinking on topics and issues. As you write, you are actively engaged with the text and ideas -- and active engagement means you will learn the material better, remember it longer, and be able to respond to it in an intelligent and critical manner. Writing your thoughts and reactions before class will give you more confidence to speak up and share your opinions with your colleagues. And when classes are well-prepared, discussion is improved for everyone.

### How to journal?

- ✍ For each entry, write the date (**required**) and the question or topic about which you will write.
- ✍ The reading guide to Armstrong has questions for each chapter. For each chapter, there is a question you are required to answer. The main goal in the required questions is to prompt you to reflect on how the historical issues Armstrong addresses relate to contemporary events. In addition to the required question, you can address the other questions posed for the chapter. You should also address issues or questions *you* have or think important.
- ✍ There are also questions on the syllabus for almost every day in class. You can address these questions in your journal as well.
- ✍ When working on your journal, you should find a place that is quiet and where you won’t be disturbed or distracted. You can write long-hand or type it at a computer -- whatever works better for you.
- ✍ Don’t worry too much about grammar or spelling. Formal language isn’t as important as exploring your own writing voice and taking risks.
- ✍ I will ask you to share what you have written in your journal periodically. For example, you may be asked to read from it as a way to start a class discussion of the topic for the day. If you don’t want your classmates (or me) to read portions of your journal, you can block out appropriate parts of it.
- ✍ Your journal entries won’t be graded individually. But your entire journal will be graded as a significant part of your final grade. I will evaluate it based on the following criteria:
  - ✍ I will see how long it is. Generally, longer journals are better than shorter. Sturgeon’s Law says that “Ninety percent of everything is crud.” Since Sturgeon was probably correct, you need to have a lot of stuff to get a significant amount of non-crud.
  - ✍ I will look at the quality of your responses. Are you engaging the issues and trying to answer the questions in a serious and significant manner? Are you aware of your reactions to the learning experiments in the class?
- ✍ Finally, take care of your journal. You will be working hard on it; it will reflect a lot of your thoughts and efforts for this class. **Bring your journal to class.**

### What / When / How to write?

- ✍ When you are engaged in a Learning Experiment, write about how it is going and how you are feeling about it.
- ✍ If the readings make you angry, confused, happy, etc., think about why you feel that way.
- ✍ If you don’t feel anything or are bored, think about why you feel that way. What would it take for you to have an emotional reaction to the material?
- ✍ Do the reading assignments with a pen or highlighter in your hand and your journal near by, so you can take notes and jot outlines.
- ✍ You should plan to write something after doing the course reading (or even while you are doing the reading). Summarize the issues / argument / ideas of the author. Think about what you have learned, how it relates to other topics or issues in the course, and how to integrate it into your web of prior knowledge.
- ✍ Be prepared to mark entries you think are particularly insightful.



- ✍ Articles from the *NYT* are good candidates for journal entries, especially once you have been assigned the country you will represent at the Jerusalem Peace Conference.
- ✍ Write lots of entries! (90% of everything is crud!)

## Assessing Journals

How will your journals be assessed?

- ⌘ Almost all journals with at least 40 entries will generally receive an 88-95 grade. Why? Because 90% of everything is crud, so if you write a lot, you are more likely to have several excellent and insightful journal entries.
- ⌘ Longer journals tend to have entries not only on required topics (like the responses to Armstrong's book) but to other issues and questions.
- ⌘ Longer journals tend to address a broad range of materials, including class readings, material from the *NYT*, current events, and other external discussions with friends, faculty, or family on the issues.
- ⌘ Journals with 28 to 39 entries will generally earn a 79-88. The grade will depend on the regularity of entries (did the writer skip a week or two?) and the quality of the entries (are some skimpy enough to suggest that author did not do the readings?).
- ⌘ Journals with fewer than 20 entries will generally earn below a 75. Again, the grade will depend on the regularity of entries and the depth and quality of analysis.
- ⌘ Note: it is possible to have a journal with numerous entries that earns a low grade. If the journal entries don't engage with the class material or if required topics and questions are not addressed, the length of the journal is irrelevant.

## Learning Experiments:

You will do three experiments, one for each of the three religions we study, that enact aspects of the religions as they are practiced by adherents. There are several goals for these experiments:

- 1) To heighten your spiritual aesthetic sense (Armstrong, p. *xvi*).
- 2) To give you a greater appreciation of what the believers in each tradition *do* in their religious practice. Most of what we do in college is read texts; these experiments will allow you an approximate experience of the religion. This isn't "book learning" but "experiential learning."

During the period of the experiments, you need to pay special attention to how you feel while doing the experiment and record your thoughts and feelings in your journal. Questions you can answer include:

- 1) Based on the way you feel during these experiments, why do you think the religions make demands similar to these on their adherents?
- 2) What do you think it would be like to do these sorts of practices on an on-going, regular basis? Would it heighten your spiritual awareness or not?
- 3) Compare these practices with those of your tradition. Does your tradition ask you to do anything similar to these observances? If not, why not?

Do not write that you hate the experiment, the course for requiring you to participate in the experiment, etc. Gripping will evoke no sympathy from me, especially since I will be participating along with you.

Your friends or family may notice your non-typical behavior. Please explain what you are doing and why you are doing it -- you may be able to teach them something about these religions!

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### Judaism:

A) For one week, you will modify your diet. You need to decide how you will do this. It is recommended that you observe some or all of the Jewish dietary laws as described by Marks and in our OLR reading. Or you may define an alternative dietary regime, although if you "roll your own" dietary laws, they have to be substantially different from your typical diet.

B) For one day, you will observe Shabbat. Our OLR readings will describe what this means for strictly observant Jews. Again, it is recommended that you observe some / most of these customs. But you can define a different set of "works" from which you will abstain.

### Christianity:

A) For one week, you will deprive yourself of something you dearly enjoy (as Christians do for the weeks before Easter, called Lent). What you give up is your choice, but it needs to be something substantial: no video games? no sex? no chocolate? Whatever it is, it has to be a serious deprivation: if you don't play video games, are not currently in a sexual relationship or are allergic to chocolate, giving up these items does not deprive you of anything.

B) Additionally, you will fast for two days. For the Orthodox, a "fast" means that "no meat, eggs, dairy products, fish, wine or oil are to be eaten" (see <http://www.oca.org/OCFasting.asp?SID=2>). You will need to discuss how you intend to "fast," based on discussion from Orthodox web sites (see the course web page). Christians traditionally fast on Wed and Fri, but if you want to fast on different days, that is OK.

### Islam:

A) For one week, you will "pray" five times per day for 3-5 minutes. You get to choose what your "prayer" will be but it must be something meaningful to you (such as the Lord's Prayer, the Rosary, or something else). You also get to choose the five times (I don't expect you to get up at dawn), but one has to be before noon, one has to be between noon and 6 PM, and one has to be after 6 PM; the other two time can be fitted in anywhere in the day, but cannot be within a hour of any other "prayer" time. Your "prayer" times have to be consistent (that is, you cannot move them from day to day), although if you are in class for one of them, you can do them immediately afterwards. Your "prayer" also must involve physical activity: facing a certain direction, doing something unusual with your hands, etc. All of this needs to be described in your journal along with explanations.

B) For one week, you will observe the Islamic dietary laws (see the OLR entry for Halal foods) and abstain from alcohol and other intoxicants (legal or illegal).

C) You will observe a fast like Muslims do during Ramadan: no food or drink (including water) between sunrise and sunset for at least one day.

NOTE:

Interestingly, all these learning experiments ask you to modify your diet in some fashion. Following the rules of kashrut and halal should pose little problem (eating vegetables for a day will probably improve your health!), but some individuals have health issues that may make fasting ill-advised. If you have health concerns, please talk to me and/or the school nurse before participating in these experiments.

*You are forbidden to participate in these learning experiments if such participation will negatively impact your health.* All the traditions make such provisions (pregnant women and nursing mothers, for example, are forbidden to fast, as are the old, infirm, and young children) and we will do so as well.