



[Mary Suydam](#)

Religion 101: Introduction to the Study of Religion: Fall 2008

Prof. Mary Suydam

Class: MWF 10:10 - 11 AM

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[Merriam Webster Online Dictionary](#)

[The Bible Unbound](#)

[LBIS Consort: Course Reserves and E-RES](#)

[The Bible on the Web](#)

[Pluralism](#)

[Ten Commandments for Essay Writing](#)

[Twenty Rules Not to Follow](#)

[Film Viewing Guidelines](#)

[The Academic Study of Religion](#)

[Defining Religion](#)

[The Seven Dimensions of Religion](#)

[Symbolism](#)

[Myth](#)

Timelines and Glossaries

Chronology of Hinduism: Literature	Glossary of Terms: Islam
Background for the Bhagavad Gita	Glossary of Terms: Hinduism
Christianity: Timeline	Glossary of Terms: Buddhism
Ancient and Early Rabbinic Judaism: Timeline	Glossary of Terms: Christianity

Goals of the Course

The aim of this course is to enable you to think clearly and critically, from an academic rather than a devotional perspective, about the various human phenomena that we call "religious". The academic study of religion takes a global and pluralistic approach, looking at religion critically while attempting to understand religious phenomena from the perspectives of participants. Learning the ways in which scholars attempt this "double stance" - critical yet empathetic - is a major goal of this course.

A second major goal of this course is to introduce you to some of the basic concepts and categories that are used by scholars in the academic study of religion. The major categories that we will study this

semester are: IDENTITY, MYTH, MORALITY (or ethics), in terms of both INDIVIDUALS AND SOCIETY, RITUAL, and the SACRED.

These concepts do not exist in an abstract vacuum but were created as tools to understand specific religious phenomena. Therefore, a third major goal of the course is to introduce you to some of the major religious traditions and to see how these concepts help us to understand these traditions better. The traditions that we will survey this semester are Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism. In our study, we will learn 1) some of the basic worldviews of each tradition, 2) how the traditions have developed historically, and 3) how religion shapes and is shaped by cultures.

Course Requirements

This course is structured as a collaborative exchange of information between students and professor. The format of the class is a combination of lecture and discussion. Active discussion of the topics is a critical component of this class. Missing more than two classes or two weekly assignments will lower your final grade by one full point (B becomes C, for example). Grades will be based upon:

- **Discussions and weekly assignments: 40% total**

There will be weekly writing assignments each week to aid in preparing for discussions of the texts. Because critical reading of the texts is so important, you will be assigned a [study partner](#) for this class. Reading and assignments will be done as a partnership. Some writing will be in-class; some will be done outside of class and brought to the class. Click [here](#) for weekly grading guidelines.

- **Four short tests on Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity: 5% each**
- **One short paper (4-6 pages), due Friday, March 21: 20%**
- **Final Exam: 20%**

Refer to [Guidelines for Short Papers](#)

Texts

Required:

Lawrence Cunningham and John Kelsay, eds., *The Sacred Quest: An Invitation to the Study of Religion*, 3rd edition (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2002)

Malcolm X as told to Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. NY: Ballantine Books.

Ramdas Lamb, *Annual Editions World Religions Reader* (McGraw-Hill)

Barbara Miller, trans., *The Bhagavad Gita*.

The Bible: New Advent Library (Note: You may use your own copy of the Bible, or download sections you need from the Online Bible listed on the course website)

Course Outline

UNIT ONE: IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY

Week 1: Aug. 29, Sept. 1, 3, 5: Intro to class; the

academic study of religion.

Readings:

Huff, *Religion: A Search for Meaning*, chapter 1 "Who Am I? Who Are We?", 2-23 (E-Res)

The Autobiography of Malcolm X, chapters 1-3

Film: *Inside Mecca*

World Religions Reader: Raimundo Panikkar, "Each Religion Expresses an Important Part of the Truth" and

John Charlot, "The Hula in Hawaiian Life and Thought"



Assignment 1

Week 2: Sept. 8, 10, 12: Identity and Community: Symbols

Readings:

The Autobiography of Malcolm X, chapters 9-11, 12-14

Cunningham, *Sacred Quest*, chapters 1 and 2

Huff, *Religion: A Search for Meaning*, chapter 2, "How Do We Communicate? Symbols and Identity" (E-Res)

Film: *Inside Mecca*

Qur'an Excerpts

World Religions Reader: "Veve: The Sacred Symbol of Vodoun"

Syncretism and the Lwa



[Click here](#) to see some Veve images

Assignment 2

**Week 3: Sept. 15, 17, 19: Identity and Community:
Ritual**

Readings:

Autobiography of Malcolm X,
chapters 16-17

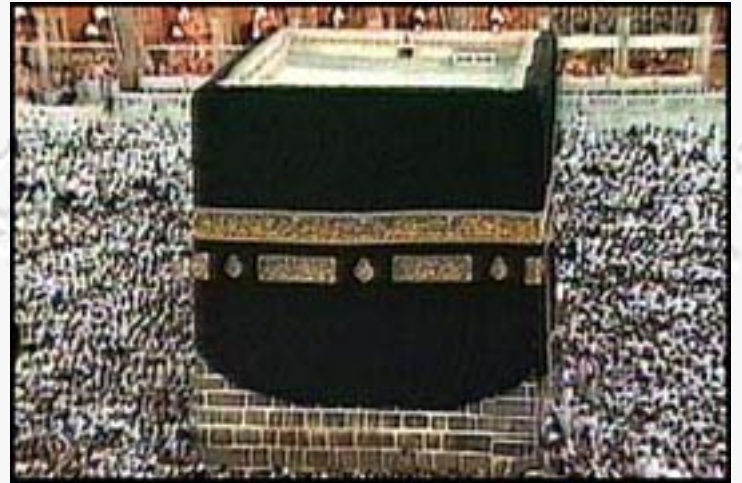
Cunningham, *Sacred Quest*, chapter 5

Film: Malcolm X

Tom Driver, "Transformation: The
Magic of Ritual" (E-Res)

World Religions Reader: "The
Adaptive Value of Religious Ritual"

Studying Ritual



UNIT TWO: MYTH

Week 4: Sept. 22, 24, 26: Myth; Hinduism

Monday: Test 1: Islam

Readings:

Cunningham, *Sacred Quest*, chapter 4,
"The Language of the Sacred"

Bhagavad Gita, chapters 1-4

World Religions Reader: "Sun Mother
Wakes the World"

Genesis, chapters 1-2



Assignment 3

Week 5: Sept. 29, Oct. 1, 3: Myth in Hinduism

Readings:

Bhagavad Gita, chapters 5-9

[Cunningham: Myth Outline](#)

Eliade, "The Structure of Myth" (E-Res)

The Parade of Ants (E-Res)

[Assignment 4](#)

Paper Topics Due



UNIT THREE: ETHICS

[Sign Up Sheet: Paper Bibliographies](#)

Week 6: Oct. 6, 8: Hinduism

Readings:

Cunningham, *Sacred Quest*, chapter 8

Bhagavad Gita, chapters 10-14

READING DAYS, OCT. 9-10



Week 7: Oct. 13, 15, 17: Buddhism

Test 2: Hinduism

Film: Footprint of the Buddha

Milinda's Chariot, The Man Who Lost his Body (P/Class)

Cunningham, *Sacred Quest*, chapter 7

Paper Bibliographies Due

Week 8: Oct. 20, 22, 24: Mahayana Buddhism

Readings:

Cunningham, *Sacred Quest*, chapter 3

The Perfections of the Bodhisattva

[Parable of the Burning House,](#)

Nagarjuna on Emptiness; The Skillful Means of Vimalakirti (P/Class, in "Experience of Buddhism", pp. 9-19)

"The Sacred is Complete Emptiness" (P/Class)



UNIT FOUR: THE SACRED

Week 9: Oct. 27, 29, 31: Mahayana Buddhism

Readings:

[Going for Refuge and Taking the Precepts](#)

Strong, *Experience of Buddhism: Sangha* (P/Class)

World Religions Reader: The Beginnings of Buddhism

Papers Due Friday, Oct. 31



Test 3: Buddhism

Week 10: Nov. 3, 5, 7: Christianity

Readings:

Cunningham, *Sacred Quest*, chapter 9

Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, chapter 1, excerpts (E-Res)

Matthew 1:18 - 2:23; chapters 5 - 7;
24:29-35; 25: 31-46; 27:11 - 28: 20
John, chapter 1; Mark 14-16

The Death of Joseph (E-Res)

[Assignment 5](#)

Film: Protestant Spirit USA

[Signup Sheet to Discuss Paper Re-Writes](#)



Week 11: Nov. 10, 12, 14: Christianity

Readings:

Cunningham, *Sacred Quest*, chapter 6

Romans chapters 5-7; 1 Corinthians 15; 1 Thessalonians 4-5

[Letter of Bishop Clement](#)

World Religions Reader: Resuscitating Passion

[Martin Luther, The Three Walls of the Romanists \(The Second Wall\)](#)

[Irenaeus of Lyons on the Apostolic Tradition](#)

Test 4: Christianity; Readings in Judaism (in class)

[Roman Arch of Titus \(81 C.E.\)](#)


[Mishnah Sample 1](#)

[Mishnah Avot](#)

[Talmud Sample](#)



UNIT FIVE: PUTTING IT TOGETHER: IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY, MYTH, ETHICS, THE SACRED

<p>Week 12: Nov. 17, 19, 21:</p>	<p>Putting it Together: Holiness, Community, and Society: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam</p>
<p><i>Readings:</i></p> <p><i>Monday:</i></p> <p>Exodus 2-20</p> <p><u>Psalm 137</u></p> <p><u>Rivers of Babylon: The Melodians</u></p> <p><u>Passover and the Exodus</u></p> <p><u>America the Beautiful</u></p> <p><u>Go Down Moses</u> <u>For the Strength of the Hills</u></p>	
<p><u>Go Down Moses, another</u></p>	

Wednesday:

[The Stations of the Cross](#)

[The Stations of the Cross: Catholic Encyclopedia Online](#)

[St. Veronica](#)

[Via Dolorosa](#)



Friday:

World Religions Reader: The Politics of Holiness in Jerusalem (117-121)

The Dome of the Rock: Jerusalem's Epicenter (167-170)

The Sacred Space of Judaism (112-113)

[Maps of Jerusalem in different time periods](#)

[Jerusalem: Where Heaven and Earth Meet](#)

[Assignment 6](#)

-----Paper Re-Writes Due -----



Week 13: Dec. 1, 3, 5: Putting it Together:

Holiness, Community, and Society: Hinduism

Monday: Film: Excerpts from the Mahabharata

[Jerusalem Insights](#)

For Wednesday:

Readings:

World Religions Reader: "Seeing the Sacred"

Bhagavad Gita, chapters 17-18

[Assignment 7](#)

[What is Puja?](#) Smithsonian Guide

[Some Observations on Brook's film](#)



For Friday:

World Religions Reader: "The Sacred is the One True Reality of Brahman"

[Assignment 8](#)

Week 14: Dec. 8, 10, 12: Putting it Together:

Monday, Dec. 8: Film: Mandala: the Sacred Circle of Vajrabhairava

Readings: (Wednesday, Dec. 10)

[Buddhist pilgrimage: the Bodhi Tree](#)

[Mt. Kailasa, Tibet](#)

[Stupas around Mt. Kailash](#)

[Dalai Lama's Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech, 10 December 1989](#)

[Dalai Lama: Words of Truth Poem](#)

The Rocket Festival, Pirit Chanting, Victor's Cage (Experience of Buddhism, pp. 20-28 in P/Class/Religion/Suydam)

Friday, Dec. 12: [Assignment 9](#)

Holiness, Community and Society: Buddhism



Final Exam handed out in class Friday, Dec. 12. Take-home portion will be due at the beginning of the in-class exam, Dec. 16.

Exam date: Tuesday, December 16, at 1:30 pm in the regular classroom, Ascension 002.