



**Religion  
& the Quest for Meaning**

**FSEM 009**

**Omid Safi**







## Religion and the Quest for Meaning (FSEM 009)

### Colgate University

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- This is an introductory venture through the religious traditions of Hindu Dharma, Buddhist Dharma, Chinese Religions, and Islam. Our approach is concerned with the various ways in which real human beings from each of these religious traditions have related to their understanding of Ultimate Reality and the multifaceted set of ritual practices and symbolic myths which shape world views and communal boundaries.
- We will also pay attention to the transformations of each of these religious traditions in order to respond to an ever-changing world and the challenges and opportunities it represents for us all.
- I see it as my task, and my privilege, to introduce you to the subject matter and to the religious men and women who have given meaning to their lives through these religious traditions. My task will often consist not of lecturing, but of steering conversation, guiding, and facilitating. In a real sense, we are as engaged with the "material" as we are with our own responses to it. That portion of our collective journey awaits your contribution: the chapter is as of yet unwritten.
- Very often students remark that they find this a very "personal" class. But of course! After all, we are engaged with the very questions of meaning of life. At the same time, we are following a rigorous academic tradition, that of religious studies. I will constantly ask you to balance the personal-experiential element with the analytical dimension in your class discussions and writings.
- It is perhaps worth discussing what this class is *not* going to be. This is not a class of

comparative history of China, India, etc. It is not an in-depth, thorough examination of any of the religious traditions discussed. Nor do I pretend to cover all of our religions: Jainism, Sikhism, Shintoism, Judaism and Christianity, and many traditional religions are not discussed. It is not a "Great Books" approach to religion: one of my fundamental assumptions is that scripture is not equal to the totality of the religious experience. I will deliberately attempt to incorporate a study of rituals, contemporary challenges, as well as sensory experiences into our venture. The sensory experiences will lead us to extensive use of music and film material.

### **Required Texts:**

1. William Paden, *Religious Worlds*
2. Roger Kamenetz, *The Jew in the Lotus*
3. Malek Chebel, *Symbols of Islam*
4. James Fadiman, *Essential Sufism*
5. *Tao Te Ching: A New English Version*, by Stephen Mitchell
6. Barbara Stoller Miller, trans. *Bhagavad-Gita*
7. Andrew Powell, *Living buddhism*
8. Jack Kornfield, ed. *Teachings of the Buddha (Revised and Expanded Edition)*
9. Dalai Lama, *Policy of Kindness*
10. Diana Eck, *A New Religious America*
11. Recommended Musical CD: Shivkumar Sharma, *Call of the Valley*.

**[Now, click below to see the actual syllabus for this class:](#)**

**[Syllabus for FSEM 009](#)**

**[Return to Omid Safi's Main Page](#)**