

Course Title: Religious Studies and the Quest for Meaning

Faculty Name: Dr. Liora Gubkin

Institution: California State University, Bakersfield

Semester Taught: Spring 2008

*"Believe nothing merely because you have been told it.
Do not believe what your teacher tells you merely out of respect for the teacher.
But whatsoever, after due examination and analysis,
you find to be kind, conducive to the good, the benefit, the welfare of all beings—
that doctrine believe and cling to, and take it as your guide."
—The Buddha*

Course Description:

RS 100 will examine the meaning of religion and what it is to be religious. Religious experience, salvation and liberation, theology and theodicy, and the expression of religion in scripture, myth, ritual, ethics, community, and politics are some of the topics we will study. This course will in particular study religion through the use of cases. Such a study will introduce students to *the academic study of religion* and lead them on a journey through some of the history, beliefs, and practices of various religious traditions from around the world.

Student Learning Outcomes:

- A. To understand some of the assumptions, theories, and methods of the academic study of religions.
- B. To learn about historical developments in selected religions.
- C. To compare different religious traditions on selected topics.
- D. To understand the interaction between religion, culture, and society.
- E. To learn how to *do* the academic study of religions.
- F. To reflect on our own responses to religious issues and concerns from a comparative, historical, and philosophical perspective.

Required Texts:

- Gary E. Kessler: *Studying Religion: An Introduction through Cases* (3rd edition)
- Readings posted on WebCT (bring paper copies to class for discussion.)

Course Requirements:

READING ASSIGNMENTS: Reading assignments are due at the beginning of class.

FILMS: The films are an integral part of this course and are intended for class discussion. Viewing questions are posted on WebCT to encourage active viewing, and questions about the films will appear on the exams. Films with library call numbers in brackets after the title are available for checking out or viewing in the library. Films without call numbers are my own or belong to colleagues and will not be loaned. All library films for the course are on two-hour closed reserve. Please do not check out films on the dates they will be shown in class.

ATTENDANCE: Attendance will be taken each day, based on the homework handed in.

HOMEWORK: Your homework assignment on the day's reading is due *at the beginning* of each class. Be sure to read the syllabus carefully to answer the correct questions, as each chapter has two sets of questions. *Homework must be typed* (I want you to take the assignments seriously and save copies for review). To get full credit, you need to do the assignment fully. Expect to type 1-2 pages (12 point, Times New Roman, double-spaced with one-inch margins). There will be no make-ups for late homework assignments unless arrangements are made in advance. Homework assignments will not be returned.

CLASS STRUCTURE: I'm interested in what you think and have to say; thus, this class depends greatly on your having done the reading and being prepared to discuss the material. The class uses group work to facilitate discussion.

EXAMS: There will be three exams, including a comprehensive final exam. Exams will consist of multiple choice, true-false, matching, and essay. Special arrangements for exams must be made in advance. Students with physical or learning disabilities should alert me to this as soon as possible, and should contact Disability Services at 664-3360 to arrange appropriate support.

Assignments and Grading Scale:

Exam One = 25%; Exam Two = 25%; Final Exam = 35%; Homework = 15%. Course Percentage: 100-93 = A; 90-92 = A-; 87-89 = B+; 83-86 = B; 80-82 = B-; 77-79 = C+; 73-76 = C; 70-72 C-; 67-69 = D+; 63-66 = D; 60-62 = D-; 59 and below = F

Extra Credit: Extra credit opportunities may be offered to the entire class at various times during the quarter. Please do not ask for individual extra credit assignments as these would place your classmates at an unfair disadvantage. To receive extra credit for an approved event, send a one paragraph e-mail about the event, including what you learned from the experience, within 48 hours of the event to me through WebCT. Extra credit will move your grade up one step if you are on the border between two grades.

Academic Integrity: Academic integrity and honesty is required. Cheating of any type will, *at a minimum*, result in a "zero" for that exam or assignment. Plagiarism will result in an "F" for the course and a notation on your permanent record for a first offense. Please familiarize yourself with the section on Academic Integrity in the CSUB Catalog. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, I urge you to meet with me or a tutor from the Writing Center before you submit any written work, including homework assignments.

Incompletes and Withdrawing from the Course: You may only take an "incomplete" in this course if you have completed 50% of the coursework at a passing level, and only for a "serious and compelling" reason. Incompletes revert to an "F" if course work is not completed by the end of the next regular calendar term.

I adhere to the university withdrawal policy. The last day to drop the course without a "W" being recorded is April 14. If you drop the course between April 15 and May 12 "for a serious and compelling reason," a "W" will appear on your transcript. After May 12, you may not drop the course unless you are withdrawing completely from the university.

Missing Class: If you must miss class, inform me via WebCT. If you will be absent due to religious holidays or participation in CSUB sponsored activities (athletics, theater, debate, music, etc.), you must

meet with me the first week of the quarter. Attendance in class is important. Much of our learning will happen when we discuss ideas with each other; when one person doesn't attend class, we all miss out.

Classroom Decorum: Come on time; come prepared. Be respectful of your instructor and fellow classmates. We are here for a common purpose so let's create an atmosphere where everyone can learn. You will be expected to participate. You can expect to be called upon; you are welcome to pass, although you are strongly encouraged to contribute. Our classroom is a safe space; if I feel you are violating that space you will be asked to leave.

Digital Classroom Decorum:

- Please—as they say on airplanes—turn off and stow **ALL** electronic devices: No cellphones, iPhones, iPods, etc.
- If you plan to use a laptop, please get my permission.
- If you're awaiting **an emergency call**, let me know before class.
- If I ask you to put away an electronic device, you will receive 0 points for that day's homework.

WebCT: You are responsible for familiarizing yourself with all the content on the site. This is also where you can view your grades throughout the quarter. I strongly encourage you check regularly to verify that your grades have been recorded correctly.

We will communicate with each other outside of the classroom mainly in person during office hours and through the email client on the course website. Therefore, you should check your email on the course website at least every evening during the week. WebCT e-mail is the best way to contact me outside of class hours. If you wish, you can forward your email from the course website to your @csub.edu account or to some other account. However, you are responsible for all communication via the email client on the course website, even if your mail does not forward properly. For example, if you forward your email to another server, but that server filters the message, you remain responsible for the content of that message.

A WebCT ID is the only means of accessing your WebCT course(s). Your WebCT ID is the same as your RunnerMail Username. If you do not know your RunnerMail Username, or are unable to login to WebCT, contact me ASAP. After logging in, set up the WebCT login hint, so that a password can be emailed to you, in the event that you forget your password.

Course Schedule:

March 25: *Welcome*

- Syllabus
- Film: *Baraka*

March 27: **Homework: Review Questions p. 12**

Thinking about Being a Student of Religion

- Kessler: Chapter 1
- Film: *In Her Own Time*

April 1: *On Defining and Studying Religion*

- Kessler: Chapter 2
- **Homework: Review Questions pp. 35-36: 1-3, 5-7, 11**
- Film: *What Do You Believe?* (David, Morgan)

April 3: *Sacred Power: Research Case—Ganesha*

- Kessler: Chapter 3
- **Homework: Review Questions p. 56: 7-8; Questions on Ganesha p. 58: 2**
- www.cix.co.uk/~ganesha/ganesha.htm “Philosophical Significance of Ganesha's form” (Mudgala Purana)
- Film: *Confucianism and Taoism* (excerpt) [BL 80.2 C66 1998]

April 8: *Myth as Sacred Story: Research Case—The Primal Man*

- Kessler: Chapter 4 (pp. 60-71; 78-80)
- **Homework: Review Questions p. 78: 1-2; Questions on Primal Man p. 80: 1-2**
- Moses: www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/moses.html
- Exodus 1-15

April 10: *Ritual as Sacred Action: Research Case—The Seder*

- Kessler: Chapter 5 (pp. 82-101)
- **Homework: Review Questions p. 98: 1, 3, 7; Questions on the Seder p. 101: 1-2**
- [Survivors Haggadah](#)
- Film: *Passover Ritual in Concentration Camps*

April 15: *Sacred Story and Sacred Action*

- Film: *The Hajj: One American's Pilgrimage* [BP187.3 .H237 1997]
- Review for Exam One

April 17: Exam One

April 22: *Experiencing the Sacred: Two Case Studies*

- Kessler: Chapter 7 (pp. 127-139)
- **Homework: Review Questions p. 152: 1-2, 5**
- [“The 12 Deeds of the Buddha” \[Read “Sixth Deed” through “Twelfth Deed”\]](#)
<http://www.simhas.org/teaching11.html>
- Hadith: “The Night Journey” (“The Night of Power and Excellence”)
Bukhari, Volume 5, Book 58, #227, Narrated Abbas bin Malik

<http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/bukhari/058.sbt.html#005.058.227>

- Film: *Walking with the Buddha* [BQ 7185 W34 1993]

April 24: *Experiencing the Sacred: Mystical Techniques and States*

- Kessler: Chapter 7 (pp. 140-148)
- **Homework: Review Questions p. 152: 5-6, 8**
- Film: *Inner Journey: The Path of Mysticism*

Saturday, April 26: Extra Credit Opportunity
Philosophy and Religious Studies Undergraduate Conference
3:30-5:00 p.m. Keynote Speaker Dr. Gary Kessler

April 29: *Explaining Evil*

- Kessler: Chapter 8 (pp. 159-181)
- **Homework: Review Questions p. 181: 1-2, 6, 8**
- Film: *America and the Holocaust*

May 1: *Explaining Evil: Research Case—Manichaeism*

[*Holocaust Remembrance Day is May 2nd*]

- Ordinary Men Chapters 7 and 8 (pp. 55-77)
- Kessler: Chapter 8 (pp. 182-183)
- Mani's Teachings (scroll down to "Mani's Teachings" and read from there ["the Myth"] to "The End of the World")
<http://www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/Religions/iranian/Manichaeism/manichaeism.htm>
- **Homework: Questions on Manichaeism p. 183: 1, 4-5**

May 6: *Religion and Morality: Duty Ethics and Virtue Ethics*

- Kessler: Chapter 9 (pp. 186-197, 199-203)
- Analects (selections)
- **Homework: Review Questions p. 203: 1-4, 6**
- Film: *Confucianism and Taoism* (excerpt) [BL 80.2 C66 1998]

May 8: *Religion and Morality: Research Case—Jain Nonviolence*

- Kessler: Chapter 9 (pp. 203-208)
- "Ahimsa" by Sri Swami Sivananda <http://www.dlshq.org/teachings/ahimsa.htm>
- **Homework: Questions on Jain Nonviolence p. 208: 1-3**
- Review for Exam Two

May 13: Exam Two

May 15: *Religion and Politics*

- Kessler: Chapter 10 (pp. 210-233)
- "Jihad"
- **Homework: Review Questions p. 233-234: 1, 3-4, 9**
- Film: *God's Warriors* (excerpt)

May 20: *Religion and Politics: Research Case—The Truth and Reconciliation Commission*

- Kessler: Chapter 10 (pp. 234-238)
- “Nuremberg or National Amnesia? A Third Way”
- **Homework: Questions on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission p. 238: 2, 4**
- Film: Allan Boesak: *Choosing for Justice* [DT779.955.B6 A5 1984]

May 22: *Organizing the Sacred*

- Kessler: Chapter 11 (pp. 240-257)
- **Homework: Review Questions p. 268: 1**
- Film: *Ten Questions for the Dalai Lama*

May 27: *Human Existence and Destiny: Research Case—Zen Buddhism*

- Chapter 12 (pp. 276-298)
- “Nothing Special”
- **Homework: Questions on Zen Buddhism p. 298: 1, 4-5**
- Film: *Principles and Practices of Zen* [BQ9294.4.J3 P7 1988]

May 29: *Religious Diversity and Truth*

- Kessler: Chapter 13 (pp. 300-317)
- **Homework: Review Questions p. 317: 6-8**
- Film: *What Do You Believe?*

Final Exam Periods:

- * 1:00 section, Tuesday, June 3, 2:00-4:30 p.m.
- * 6:00 section, Thursday, June 5, 5:00-7:30 p.m.