



Topic
Religion
& Theology

Subtopic
Comparative
& World Religion

Cultural Literacy for Religion: Everything the Well-Educated Person Should Know

Course Guidebook

Professor Mark Berkson
Hamline University



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Cultural Literacy for Religion: Everything the Well-Educated Person Should Know

Scope:

A recent poll of Americans revealed an alarming lack of basic knowledge about the world's religions. The vast majority of Americans cannot name the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism or the Five Pillars of Islam. Only 38 percent know that Vishnu and Shiva are Hindu gods. Most do not know what Ramadan is or when the Jewish Sabbath begins. More surprising still, a Gallup poll revealed that only half of American adults can name even one of the four Gospels of the New Testament.

This course is designed to teach you the basics of world religions—their origins, historical figures, rituals, scriptures, holidays, and key teachings—the things that we need to know in order to consider ourselves religiously literate.

Why should we study these religious traditions? One reason is to better understand our world. You cannot open a newspaper or watch the evening news without encountering stories with a religious dimension.

Another reason is to better understand our neighbors. Recent surveys show that, on average, half of a person's close friends practice a religion different from their own, and two-thirds of Americans have at least one extended family member of another faith. In a very practical sense, these lectures will help you understand the religious objects and texts that would be found in the home, the special diets that might be eaten, and the rituals that might be performed by someone close to you.

Finally, religions deal with the fundamental questions of human existence: Who am I? Is there a God or an ultimate reality? Why is there evil in the world? How should I live? Understanding religion helps us to better understand ourselves.

We begin by exploring what a religious tradition is. Does it have to include belief in a God or gods? What provides coherence to religious traditions given their remarkable diversity? We will examine a number of ways of defining religion and the strengths and weaknesses of each. We will find that religious traditions are living, changing things and that they are not so much characterized by agreement among members as by commonly held commitments to certain scriptures, practices, and figures, even as members debate about what these mean.

Lecture 2 examines important themes that nearly all religions address: the concept of divinity or ultimate reality, scripture, ritual, understandings of good and evil, and the idea of salvation or liberation.

Lectures 3–5 explore Hinduism, one of the world’s oldest religious traditions. We will discuss its ancient scriptures, such as the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita, and we will review the dazzling panoply of Hindu gods, such as Vishnu and Shiva. We will visit their ancient temples and join in their colorful festivals.

Unlike Hinduism, Buddhism began with a single man, Siddhartha Gautama, who became the Buddha around 2,500 years ago. Lectures 6 and 7 look at his life and teaching, including the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism. We will see the various forms that Buddhism evolved into as it traveled to different cultures, from Thailand to Tibet.

In Lectures 8–10, we will encounter the gods, ghosts, and ancestors of traditional Chinese religion; learn about qi and fēng shui; examine the extraordinary influence of the *Analects* of Confucius with its emphasis on ritual, learning, and family; and explore the Daoist themes of harmony and nature in the enigmatic Daode Jing.

Lecture 11 looks at the indigenous religion of Japan, Shinto, with its kami (gods and sacred beings), beautiful shrines, and grand festivals. We will also observe two examples of Asian shamans: Korean *mudang* and Hmong shamans, with their emphasis on healing and communicating with gods and spirits.

Lecture 12 follows Buddhism to East Asia, where it takes on the forms of Zen Buddhism, which stresses sitting meditation, and Pure Land Buddhism, which features chanting and offers liberation through Amida Buddha.

Lectures 13–15 examine Judaism, its sacred texts of Torah and Talmud, and the diverse forms of Jewish life. Major holidays, rituals, and dietary practices are put into their historical context. We will follow Jewish history from biblical times through the Holocaust of the 20th century and note the importance of Jerusalem and the Hebrew Bible as focuses of Jewish faith.

Lectures 16–18 discuss Christianity from the life of Jesus through the theology of Paul to the Catholic and Orthodox Churches and the Protestant Reformation. The traditional denominations of the Christian faith are described, and the modern evangelical, fundamentalist, Pentecostal, and liberal Christian movements are compared and explained.

Lectures 19–21 deal with the religion that seems to be most misunderstood in the West: Islam. These lectures reveal facets of Islam—its philosophers, mystics, and scientists; the beauty of Qur’anic chanting and Arabic calligraphy; and the centrality of devotion to one God—that are often overlooked in the evening news. Both the unity of Islam, seen in the Five Pillars, and its diversity are explored.

Lecture 22 explores three religions that are relatively small in terms of their total number of adherents but that have had a major impact on the world around them: the Jain, Sikh, and Baha’i faiths. We will study the remarkable Jain commitment to nonviolence, the importance of Sikh gurus, and ongoing revelation in the Baha’i faith.

Lecture 23 discusses religion in America and examines some of the fascinating Supreme Court cases that have determined the relationship between religion and government in the United States. We will look at debates over the free exercise of religion and the separation of church and state.

Our final lecture looks at important trends in religion today, including feminist theology, increased religious diversity, growth in conservative

Christianity, and a dramatic increase in religiously unaffiliated Americans. We will discuss exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism as alternative responses to greater religious diversity, and we will conclude the course with an examination of a critical issue in today's world: the relation of religion, violence, and peace.

The approach of this course throughout is that of the imaginative insider as we examine other religions with openness and empathy. By understanding the religious traditions that have shaped our fellow human beings, we connect more deeply with them. By cultivating our religious literacy, we better understand our world, our neighbors, ourselves, and the events of our time. ■

Religion—Its Meaning and Importance

Lecture 1

The story of the great Sufi master Mullah Nasruddin provides a helpful reminder, and cautionary tale, of the idea lighting or illuminating our understanding of concepts, symbols, and traditions from other practices and religions, especially compared with our own. Other traditions will provide their own sources of illumination. Rather than try to understand other traditions through our pre-existing categories, we might acquire new categories for understanding. Not only might we find surprising, thought-provoking answers to the questions we bring to religious study, but we might find that even our questions themselves need to be re-examined.

Americans and Religion

- There is no doubt that religion is a profoundly important subject of study, and that it matters on many levels. Author Stephen Prothero of Boston University argues that religious literacy is essential for an educated citizen in a democracy; unfortunately, Americans are not doing well in this area at all.
- According to the results of the Pew Forum Religious Quiz, Americans do not know much about nonbiblical traditions. In fact, only half of American adults can name even one of the four Gospels of the New Testament, nor could they identify Martin Luther.
- Americans do so poorly on religious tests in part because few American public schools teach about religion; this may be due to administrators' reluctance to bring religion into the classroom. However, there is a vast difference between proselytizing or requiring religious acts in school and teaching about religion.
- The Supreme Court's school prayer ruling states: "It might well be said that one's education is not complete without a study of comparative religion or the history of religion and its relationship to

the advancement of civilization.” Public schools certainly can teach world religions, but only 23 percent of Americans know this.

Reasons to Study Religion

- First, you cannot understand the world without understanding religion. Religion is one of the strongest motivators of human behavior.
- Consequences of religious ignorance can be serious. This is seen in numerous recent examples: a leading U.S. government official with Middle East responsibilities who could not explain the difference between Sunni and Shia Islam; religious bigotry and ignorance displayed toward Sikh Americans, who were violently targeted after September 11 because they were mistaken for Muslims; a US Airways flight making an emergency landing because of an onboard Orthodox Jewish prayer ritual.
- People have always been shaped and guided by understandings and traditions that we can call religious. Neanderthals and early modern humans practiced burial rituals with religious elements. Another example is found in 100,000-year-old human skeletons in an Israeli cave, stained with red ochre and surrounded by religious elements.
- Religious ideas have produced some of the most extreme examples of good and evil in human history. Religious motivations can lead to selfless sacrifice, profound love, social justice movements, and awe-inspiring beauty, as well as bigotry, closed-mindedness, and mass murder.
- Thus, our first reason to study religion is to understand world events and human behavior, both in our time and throughout history. Second, most countries today demonstrate significant religious diversity.
- Not only is there diversity among faiths in the United States; there is also great diversity within each religious tradition. Also, think about the degree to which concepts and practices from the world’s

religions have become part of the common vocabulary in the United States.

- Therefore, we need to understand other religious traditions so that we can understand our nation and our neighbors. In a very practical sense, you should understand the religious objects and texts that would be found in a neighbor's home, the special diets that might be eaten, and the rituals that might be performed.
- As we reflect on these first two reasons why we should study religion—to understand world events and to understand our own country and neighbors—we see why an understanding of religion is important for cultivating citizenship. As voters in elections and as participants in civic life, it is imperative that we be informed.
- The third reason to study religion is to attain greater self-understanding. Religious traditions lead to questions that every one of us must think about if we are to live the examined life that is distinctly human: How should I live? What gives life meaning?



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Although a significant majority of Americans consider themselves religious, they are surprisingly uneducated about the core beliefs of even their own faiths.

- So, the encounter with religious traditions should be an existential encounter. This can be an unsettling experience; it might lead us to question some of our fundamental beliefs and values.
- Cultivating religious literacy is an essential first step in gaining a deeper understanding—but it is only a first step. There is no substitute for direct experience, including travel to other countries, visits to religious institutions, and conversations with members of other traditions.

How to Study Religion

- Now that we have talked about the importance of studying religion, we should ask, how should we study religion? The study of religion involves the disciplines of history, theology, philosophy, literature, sociology, psychology, anthropology, music, and art, among others; it is a multidisciplinary field.
- In this course, we will try to attain the imaginative insider’s perspective on other religious traditions, and when we study our own tradition, we will strive to retain the ability to step outside of it and engage in rigorous critique.

What Is Religion?

- Many scholars believe that the root of the word “religion” comes from the Latin *ligare*, which means “connecting or binding” (as with our word “ligament”). So, *religare*, a rebinding, refers to establishing the connection between humans and deities.
- Coming up with a definition of religion is a useful exercise to undertake before we begin our study, as it raises important issues. In addition, how one defines religion can have legal, political, and social import.
- There are two common approaches to defining a word: the first one is called a substantive definition and the latter a functional definition.

- The substantive definition makes it easy to determine what counts as a religion, as we only need to ask, does this system of belief include belief in a deity or deities? But there is a drawback: What about a tradition like Zen Buddhism? As we will see, there is nothing in Zen that looks like the biblical God or the gods of the Hindu pantheon. Might a substantive definition like this be too limiting?
- The functional definition of religion is “providing answers and giving meaning,” and now we see the opposite problem. Some functional definitions emphasize the way that religions bind people together in communities around shared beliefs and practices. Could this not also include devoted fans of the Boston Red Sox? Many argue that functional definitions are too broad.
- The limitations of these two approaches have led to a third approach in definition, which is known as the family resemblance approach. This looks at elements or clusters of characteristics that are common among what we would normally call religion.
- Unlike the substantive approach, there is no one single feature that all religions must possess. This is why the family resemblance metaphor is used.
- Further complicating the matter is the debate over what is called reductionism in religious studies. A reductionistic definition uses terms to explain one phenomenon, such as religion, entirely in terms of other phenomena, such as biology or psychology. The essence of reductionism is saying that religion is nothing but a psychological coping mechanism, or nothing but a genetic disposition.
- This raises an important question: Must a definition do justice to the self-understanding of religious believers? Perhaps religion, like love, is too complex and multilayered to be reducible to any one explanation.
- This lecture series will take a family resemblance approach that will focus on those traditions that have most of the features that

we normally associate with religion. These are the traditions that have collectively shaped the lives of the vast majority of the world's population for the last 2,500 years—Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, Shinto, Shamanism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. We will also study the traditions of smaller groups that have had a major impact—the Jain, Sikh, and Baha'i traditions, among others.

- As we look at each tradition individually as well as the relationships among them, and also engage in comparative reflection along the way, we encounter another important question: What is the nature of a tradition? We can begin to see those elements that are shared among most or all members of that tradition.

Ways to Think about Religion

- We can begin by understanding that traditions are not about shared agreements. In fact, it makes more sense to think of traditions as ongoing conversations—often debates and arguments—about things to which all members are committed. Rather than think about agreements, think about those things that the members of the traditions care about and what matters to them.
- It is not agreements but commitments that make traditions. As we encounter each tradition in this series, we will enter into it through an exploration of those things that matter most to its practitioners.
- There is a cautionary story from the Meiji era (late 19th–early 20th century) of a Zen master who receives a professor. The professor begins pontificating about the teachings of Zen. The master begins pouring tea and keeps pouring until the cup overflows. The professor exclaims, “The cup is overfull. No more will go in!” “Like this cup,” the master says, “you are full of your own opinions and speculations. How can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup?”
- We all bring along preconceived notions as we begin our study. We must do our best to set these aside so that we can begin with as

open a mind as possible; this is what Zen teachers call the beginner's mind.

Suggested Reading

Kessler, *Studying Religion*.

Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*.

Prothero, *Religious Literacy*.

Tippett, *Speaking of Faith*.

Van Voorst, *Anthology of World Scriptures*.

Questions to Consider

1. Look up the Pew Forum Religious Quiz online and compare your religious literacy with that of the average American. What religions would you like to know more about and why?
2. Why is religious literacy important even for people who are not religious?
3. Are there particular elements or characteristics that something must have for it to be considered a religion? If so, what are they?

Facets of Religion—Divinity and Devotion

Lecture 2

There is a wide range of conceptions of God, and we need to explore some of the most commonly held beliefs. The category of divinity is one of five key themes that we will encounter in almost every religious tradition. In addition to divinity, the other four categories are scripture, ritual, good and evil, and soteriology (the doctrine of salvation or liberation).

The Topic of God

- People who believe in some kind of God or gods are called theists, after the word *theos*, the Greek for “god.” Those who believe that there is no God are atheists. Agnostics are those who do not know whether there is a God or not.
- Some scholars have argued that simply asking people whether or not they believe in God is not sufficient to really capture the attitudes people have toward the existence of a deity. Richard Dawkins came up with a seven-point scale to determine people’s beliefs with more precision. Try to locate where you are on the scale:
 1. Absolute certainty in God’s existence.
 2. High degree of confidence in God’s existence, but with some doubt.
 3. Leaning toward belief in God’s existence, but with less confidence.
 4. Completely neutral—equal degree of probability that there is or is not a God.
 5. Leaning toward rejection of the belief in God.

6. High degree of confidence that God does not exist, but with some doubt.
 7. Absolute certainty in the nonexistence of God.
- Simply asking people the yes/no question, “Do you believe in God,” makes it seem like there are only 1s and 7s out there. However, a majority may fall in categories 2 through 6.

What Do People Believe about God?

- When we turn to conceptions of God, we find a number of categories that determine the nature of people’s beliefs.
- There are many varieties of polytheism. Normally, the gods are organized into pantheons, although this may be done in different ways. In some cases, each god occupies a different plane of existence or has a different function and does not interact with the others. In most cases, the gods do interact, often making alliances, fighting, marrying, or engaging in other activities that parallel those of the human realm.
- According to the latest statistics, over half of the world’s population believes in one God (approximately 55 percent—a very rough estimate); they are monotheists.
- Another belief system is pantheism, which is derived from the root “pan” or “all.” This is the belief that God is identical with the universe (or at least the natural universe) or that the natural world is itself divine.
- Finally, there are traditions, such as Zen Buddhism, that do not feature God, gods, or supernatural beings. Such traditions emphasize uncovering the spiritual possibilities within ourselves.

Forms and Images of God

- When deities are understood to possess form, they are often seen as being quite similar to human beings. This is known as

anthropomorphism, which means attributing human form and characteristics to the deities.

- Think about the various images of God that people have, beginning with God as a parent. One issue that arises with the parental metaphor involves gender. In traditional monotheism, God is frequently described as father. But if this language is metaphorical, and God does not really have a gender, then why not also refer to God as mother?



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Many common images of a monotheistic God are authoritarian or judgmental in nature.

- Another common image is God as ruler, lord, or judge. These images emphasize God's authority and God's activity of dispensing justice. In some traditions, God can be portrayed as a child, or even a baby. Images of innocence, purity, and even playfulness can be seen in some traditions. On the other side of the spectrum, God can sometimes be seen as a destroyer, a being who is wrathful and bloodthirsty.
- In some traditions, gods are seen as having the forms of animals or of human-animal hybrids. In other cases, the natural elements themselves—the sun, stars, or fire—can themselves be seen as deities.

The Topic of Scripture

- To determine which books a culture considers scripture, you have to watch the way that practitioners of a religion relate to certain books.

People often chant scripture, recite it in community rituals, cover it with decorative adornment, memorize it, compose commentaries about it, write it in beautiful calligraphy, give lectures and sermons about it, and put it in a special location.

- In any given culture, how are sacred words to be understood? What do they mean? How do we interpret the texts, and who has the authority to judge the truth and validity of interpretations? This will be a central question that arises in every tradition.

Ritual—Context and Categories

- When we think about our lives, we can see that they are structured in numerous ways by ritual activity, from our daily rituals to important rituals at certain moments in our lives to large-scale rituals carried out by a religious institution or the state. But what is a ritual, and how does it differ from a habit or a routine?
- In a religious context, rituals can be understood as the formalized movements and language that are given to us by our traditions and are carried out in contexts that are understood as sacred.
- Rituals can be divided into a number of categories. One type of ritual is the life-cycle ritual, often called rites of passage because they mark a transition from one state of being to the next. The major passages that are covered in almost all traditions are birth, coming of age, marriage, and death.
- Another category is nature-based rituals, and these are cyclic, seasonal celebrations. Such rituals connect human beings with the movements of the larger natural world, cultivating a sense of gratitude, awe, and reverence for nature (and, in some cases, the God or gods who create and sustain the natural world).
- This brings us to historically based rituals. These are rituals that commemorate important events in the history of a tradition.

- Rituals can infuse our ordinary lives with a sense of the sacred. Reflect on the ways that our shared meals are transformed through ritual from the biological act of eating to a cultural expression of togetherness. Think of how ritual guides the ways we express respect, gratitude, or remorse to each other, or helps us navigate the act of meeting a stranger.

Good and Evil

- Religious traditions have to account for why there is suffering and evil in the world and offer a way to understand and cope with it. With all of the profound differences that exist among religious traditions, they all seem to share at least one thing: a belief that there is some basic order in the cosmos.
- Monotheistic traditions have a challenge in proving this. If God is omniscient (all knowing), omnipotent (all powerful), and omnibenevolent (all good), why is there evil in the world?
- The attempt to solve this problem is called theodicy, which comes from Greek and means “the justice of God.” Since God is all powerful, God must be able to end evil and suffering. Since God is all good, he must be willing to end it. So, what kind of theodicies are possible?
- One theodicy is based on free will, arguing that God created people with the freedom to choose good or evil, which means that some will choose evil and harm others.
- Other theodicies emphasize that we grow as people and become strong through suffering—that a full, meaningful life requires struggle and we cannot know joy without sorrow. Some call this the soul-making theodicy.
- Some theodicies advise us to simply accept that it is all a part of God’s plan and that everything will be made right in the end. This might mean that we receive rewards and punishment after each of us dies, so that any seeming injustice is rectified.

- Some theologians have come to understand God differently. Perhaps God is not omnipotent after all; perhaps God is not the kind of being who can directly intervene in human affairs. Maybe God only acts in cooperation with, or through, human beings, providing a source of power from whom human beings can derive strength.
- It is also important to note that traditions that are not theistic also have to come up with theodicies, and these also have their weaknesses. Many Asian traditions feature a belief in karma and rebirth, the law of cause and effect where our actions, good and bad, lead to good and bad results later in this life or in a future life. These systems can account for seemingly unjust suffering by seeing it as a result of past karma, perhaps from a previous life.
- Religious traditions are also concerned with the pursuit of the good. Ethical questions include: How should I live? What is good and bad, right and wrong?
- Many forms of ethics focus on the rightness or wrongness of actions, but ethical judgment can also focus on virtue ethics. In other words, instead of focusing on individual actions, you work to become a good person with guidance from the tradition, and then good actions will flow from your character.
- Virtually every religious tradition has an element of virtue ethics, and it is instructive to compare the virtues that are considered the most important in each tradition.

Soteriology

- The term “soteriology” comes from the Greek word *soter*, which means “savior,” and means “doctrine of salvation” or “liberation.”
- Theologian John Hick puts it this way: Religions all provide a way to move beyond the initial state, which is often seen as some kind of self-centered state, one of dissatisfaction, to the final state, in which one experiences a profound connection to the ultimate reality and achieves the highest spiritual state.

- As we look at the different traditions, we will examine their diagnosis of what afflicts us, how it can be overcome, what the ultimate goal is, and how to achieve it.

Suggested Reading

Kessler, *Studying Religion*.

Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*.

Van Voorst, *Anthology of World Scriptures*.

Questions to Consider

1. Where would you rate yourself on Richard Dawkins's 1–7 scale of belief in God, and what are some of the reasons for your certainty and/or doubts?
2. If you believe in a divine being or in some ultimate reality, do images come to mind when you think of it? If so, what kinds of images are they, and where do they come from? If not, what comes to mind when you think of the divine, and by what means do you focus your attention on the divine?
3. What are the most important rituals, religious or secular, that you incorporate in your life? What meaning do they carry for you?
4. How do you explain the evil in the world? Does the existence of evil and injustice pose a challenge to the belief in God?

Hinduism—Foundational Texts and Teachings

Lecture 3

Hinduism is considered by some scholars to be the oldest living major religion in the world. By some estimates, there are nearly a billion Hindus, making it the world's third largest religion after Christianity and Islam. While most Hindus are found in South Asia, Hindus can also be found in many other parts of the world, such as England, Canada, and the United States.

A Brief History of Hinduism

- It is hard to find a statement of belief that would be agreed on by all Hindus. There is no centralized authority to enforce orthodoxy, no universally accepted creed.
- The very word “Hindu” itself did not originate with Indians trying to describe shared religious beliefs; rather, it was used, in various forms, by outsiders (such as Persians, Greeks, and Arabs) to refer to the people who lived in an area beyond the Indus River.
- At the same time, there is universality to Hinduism. Anybody who finds Hindu teachings compelling, engages in study of the Hindu tradition, practices the rituals, and so forth, can become a Hindu.
- The two great traditions that served as the foundations for Hinduism were the Indus River Valley Civilization and the Vedic tradition.
- The Indus River Valley Civilization flourished around 4,500 years ago. A number of important features of later Hinduism—the importance of goddesses, the centrality of bathing and the use of water in rituals, many of the animals prominently featured, and the significance of yoga and meditation—may have their origins with the Indus River Valley Civilization.

- The people known as Aryans migrated into India from the north around 2000 B.C.E. The Aryans brought with them (1) their scriptures, known as the Vedas, and the language in which they were written, a form of Sanskrit; (2) a pantheon of gods; (3) rituals officiated by priests, called brahmins; and (4) a social class system.
- The period that saw the rise and flourishing of Aryan culture and the primacy of their texts and rituals is known as the Vedic period (1500–500 B.C.E.). This was the foundation out of which Hinduism arose.

The Four Social Classes

- Aryan society was divided into four social classes. The top two consisted of Brahmins (priests) and Kshatriyas (the warriors and rulers). The third social class is the Vaishyas (the merchants, traders, and farmers), and the fourth and lowest class is the Shudras (servants).
- These four classes are known as Varnas, and they form the basis of what will later become the Hindu caste system. The top three varnas are known as “twice-born.” Traditionally, only those twice-born can have access to the Vedic texts; the shudras were denied this.



The four-headed image of Brahma represents the fourfold nature of many Hindu beliefs, including the four varnas, or social classes.

- “Veda” is a word that means “knowledge” or “wisdom.” In fact, it is worth pointing out that Sanskrit belongs to the vast Indo-European language family, which also contains English. This means that there will be many connections between Sanskrit and English words.
- The Vedas are some of the oldest existing texts in an Indo-European language. Although the earliest parts of the Vedas date back to approximately 1500 B.C.E., it is unlikely that these texts were written down until around 1,000 years later. The texts were orally, and accurately, transmitted for centuries.
- The Vedas are divided into four sections that contain different types of texts. The oldest is the Rig Veda, which contains 1,028 hymns dedicated to a variety of deities. The final portion of the Vedas is the Upanishads, texts that are highly philosophical and speculative.
- In the Vedic hymns, we see an emphasis on rituals performed for the gods in the hopes of gaining benefits in this world, for this life. There is not a significant otherworldly aspect to the early Vedic hymns.
- Of the many gods in the Vedas, there are three that are most important—Agni, Soma, and Indra. Agni is fire, a central component of Vedic ritual. Soma is a consciousness-expanding beverage made from a plant or mushroom that was consumed during rituals. Indra is a warrior god and a king who defeated the serpent demon and released the waters (making the land fertile).
- Two final Vedic themes are worth mentioning. The first is that there is a cosmic order that must be upheld. The second theme involves Vedic accounts of the creation of the world. According to the Rig Veda, the world began with the sacrifice of a cosmic primordial being named Purusha. The entire universe is seen as a single vast organism.

- Within this vision is an account of the origins of the social hierarchy. Thus, the Vedas give a divine origin to the four social classes, the varnas.
- As mentioned, the Vedic texts were used in a ritual context. They were often spectacles that involved the construction of a great altar. The rituals, which were officiated by Brahmin priests, were largely replaced over time with the temple and home rituals known as pujas.

The Influence of the Upanishads

- Around the 6th century B.C.E., an increasing number of religious seekers were leaving the Vedic fold and striking out on new paths. The part of the Vedas that had the greatest impact on Indian philosophy, and in fact were to later influence philosophical movements in the West as well, are the Upanishads.
- Whereas the early Vedic hymns focus on maximizing welfare in this life, the Upanishads believe attachment to the things of this world produces suffering. Along with this attitude was a particular belief about life and death: as long as people are bound by attachment to this world, they will continue to be reborn indefinitely. The cycle of birth, death, and rebirth is known as samsara. A belief in rebirth would be widespread in India from this period onward.
- For the Indian traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, rebirth is bad news. If life is characterized by suffering, by aging, sickness and death, then who would want to go through the whole thing over and over again? The ultimate goal, then, is to achieve the liberation that would free you from the cycle.
- A crucial question that will be addressed in all of the Indian traditions is what gets reborn. In the Upanishads and in much of later Hinduism, there is the notion of an eternal, unchanging soul called Atman. While the material parts of the body return to earth on death, the soul is reborn repeatedly until liberation.

The Concept of Karma

- For Hinduism, the concept that explains the mechanics of the rebirth process is karma. The word “karma” means “action,” and it refers to the inexorable law of cause and effect: Who we are today is the product of our previous actions, and our current actions will shape who we are in the future.
- The soul is reborn in accordance with its karma, but you have freedom to choose what to do with these circumstances and thus shape your future karma.
- The Upanishads tell us that if we understood our true identity as Atman, we would be liberated from suffering. One way to describe the nature of Atman is pure consciousness. It is pure subjectivity, awareness itself. The Upanishads teach that this is your true identity, and that this is changeless, deathless, eternal.
- We now see one of the most fundamental tensions within Hinduism: the importance of preserving cosmic and social order by finding one’s place within it and the quest to find liberation from the world through renunciation, asceticism, and nonattachment. Some of the most powerful ideas in Hinduism have come from attempts to reconcile this tension.

The Four Ends/Goals of Humanity

- There are two systems within Hinduism that allow a place for seemingly conflicting ideals and goals. The first is the Four Ends/Goals of Humanity.
- The first goal is the vitally important concept of dharma, which connotes duty or obligation. The second end is the realm of material gain, wealth, and power—*artha*. The third end is pleasure, *kama*. Hinduism preserves a place for the realm of pleasures of all kinds—sexual, of course, but also many areas of aesthetic pleasure—music, poetry, art, dance, and food. Finally, there is the fourth goal of moksha, liberation from the samsaric cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.

- In its most expansive sense, dharma connotes right conduct and has elements of law and morality. While there are many factors that go into establishing one's dharma, two are of greatest importance: one's social class/varna, and the stage of life that one is in, one's ashrama.
- The caste hierarchy is also connected with notions of purity and pollution. The most polluting jobs—dealing with dead bodies, cleaning streets and bathrooms, handling garbage, et cetera—are relegated to those who are considered outside of the caste system (outcastes) commonly known as untouchables, Dalits, or the oppressed.
- While the modern Indian constitution formally outlawed untouchability, it still exists in many ways. Dalits are often prevented from worshipping in certain temples or drawing water from certain wells.

The Key Life Stages

- While much of one's dharma is determined by caste, another key element is the stage of life that one is in. The tradition recognizes that people will aim for different goals during different parts of their life.
- The first stage is that of the student. The next stage is the householder stage. This is the time of life to get married (through a properly arranged marriage, a practice still found throughout much of India today), raise children, get a job, and earn money.
- The next stage, that of the forest dweller, hermit, or—more familiar to us—the “retiree,” generally occurs when a person has grandchildren and is ready to withdraw from the life of working. The fourth and final phase is that of the renunciate, the most committed of whom live out their remaining days as celibate beggars focusing on following spiritual pursuits.

- In the West, the latter part of life is supposed to be a time to enjoy the wealth that one has accumulated, to live a comfortable life, to focus on one's children and grandchildren. In the traditional Hindu system, the emphasis is on withdrawal, on giving up possessions and ties to the world and, ultimately, to family.
- Rather than approach life as a series of either/or choices, Hinduism finds a way for both/and. It has a generally inclusive and pluralistic approach in much of its religious orientation.

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Questions to Consider

1. Hinduism sees the four goals of humanity as dharma (duty), *artha* (wealth and power), *kama* (pleasure), and *moksha* (liberation). How do these compare with your own ideas of the goals of life? Are these goals compatible with each other, or are some mutually exclusive?

2. How do the traditional stages of life in Hinduism—student, householder, forest dweller or hermit, and renunciate—compare with your ideas of the stages of life?
3. If you do not currently believe in rebirth, how would such a belief change the way you live your life? Do you believe in some form of karma?

Hindu Gods and Devotional Practices

Lecture 4

To the non-Hindu, the Hindu gods can appear quite strange and overwhelming. First, there are so many of them. Second, they can appear in manifestations that range from childlike to loving to bloodthirsty. At times, contradictory elements will be embodied in a single deity. But reflecting on divinity through the lens of Hindu gods can lead even the non-Hindu to new insights about the nature of divinity.

The Hindu Representation of Gods

- Hindus do not shy away from representing gods; Hindu temples and homes almost always feature paintings and statues of gods. This is an obvious difference between Hinduism and, say, Judaism and Islam, which prohibit making any images of God.
- Given that in both Hinduism and Islam (the two largest religions of India) people are tremendously devoted to God, why are there such radically different opinions about representing God?
- There is the response of Judaism and Islam: Given that God is infinite, do not even try to represent God. If you do, you will end up worshipping the representation, becoming idolaters, in the process circumscribing and limiting God, who is in fact limitless.
- Hinduism approaches this differently: Since divine reality is infinite, never stop representing it; never think you have it all in one image. The answer is not the avoidance of representation but endless multiplicity.
- In Hinduism, there is an emphasis placed on the visual. Hindus believe that it is important to see and be seen by the deity. This is known as darshan, the experience of visual connection between the worshipper and the deity.

- Most Jews, Christians, and Muslims think of God as a separate being. There is another approach that we encounter in the Upanishads. Previously we learned about the Atman, or soul, our true Self. There is another important term: “Brahman.” This is the word that Hindus use to refer to ultimate reality.
- Brahman is often described using three Sanskrit words: *sat cit ananda*. *Sat* means “being.” *Cit* means “consciousness.” *Ananda* means “bliss.” So Brahman is being-consciousness-bliss.
- So now we know that we each have a soul (Atman) and we know about ultimate reality (Brahman). The Chandogya Upanishad reveals “that art thou”—*tat tvam asi*. Your soul, your Atman, is identical with ultimate reality, Brahman. When we recognize our identity with the ultimate reality, we achieve liberation.
- So there is oneness underlying all multiplicity, and we need to see all other beings as manifestations of the divine. When you greet someone in India, it is customary to put your hands together and say, “Namaste.” This has been interpreted as something like, “The divine in me bows to the divine in you.”
- Many Hindus focus their worship on one deity. You can often tell what god a Hindu worships by a special marking on the forehead, known as a tilak. A tilak is usually made with a substance like sandalwood paste, kunkum powder, clay, or even ashes.
- In most cases, while Hindus will see the god they worship as supreme, they do not see other gods as false. For many Hindus, all of the gods are seen as manifestations of the one Brahman. This is why Hinduism can be seen as polytheistic from one angle, but monistic—emphasizing the oneness of all being—from another.
- Some Hindus worship many deities, for they see different deities performing different functions and representing different characteristics of God.

The Representative Gods—Vishnu (and Avatars), Shiva, and Devi

- The best way to approach the deities is to talk about three categories, representing the gods who are most widely worshipped in India and whose images are most often seen in temples and homes—Vishnu and his avatars (especially Krishna and Rama); Shiva in his many forms; and Devi, the goddess, in her many forms.
- Vishnu is seen as the all-pervading Lord of the Universe and protector of humanity. Many Vishnu worshippers wear a tilak on their foreheads that consists of two vertical lines joined at the bottom to make a U or V shape. It is said that this shape represents Vishnu's footprint.
- Vishnu is usually portrayed with blue skin, which is said to represent vastness. He has four arms, which indicate power. His four arms hold a conch shell, a discus, a mace, and a lotus flower. The conch is said to represent Vishnu's creative power and is associated with the divine sound of the cosmos (and which is often blown in religious ritual), and the lotus flower represents purity and liberation.
- Many Hindu deities are depicted in male-female pairs. The female power is called Shakti, and it is necessary to activate the spiritual power that resides in the male. The goddesses depicted with the male gods are often called consorts. Vishnu's consort is Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth.
- One of the most important features of Vishnu is that he manifests himself in avatars to help humans when we are in need. There are 10 great avatars associated with Vishnu. Two avatars are most important and are widely worshipped throughout India: Krishna and Rama.
- Krishna has been called the best loved of all Hindu gods. He takes many forms, and in virtually all he is depicted with dark blue skin and long black hair. He is sometimes depicted as a small child enjoying his favorite treat, butter. The mischievous young Krishna is sometimes known as the butter thief.

- As he grows, he becomes known as a protector of his people. One of the most common portrayals of Krishna shows him as a cowherd (Krishna Gopala), a handsome young man playing the flute and often flirting with the young girls around him.
- If Krishna is the divine in the form of child or lover, Vishnu's avatar of Rama is an exemplar of the courageous warrior honoring his dharma—doing his sacred duty no matter the consequences. Rama is the hero of the epic *Ramayana*.
- There are a number of Hindu festivals associated with Rama. The two most popular celebrations are of his victory over Ravana and Diwali, the festival of lights.
- Shiva is a god who embodies opposites. Like Krishna, he is represented in many ways, but in Shiva's case, these take forms that seem contradictory.
- Let us begin with Shiva as the Lord of Yoga. His trident is a weapon against evil and ignorance. Shiva's third eye, if turned inward, gains wisdom and insight; if turned outward, it can be the eye of destruction, destroying greed, ego, and lust.
- Devotees of Shiva wear a distinctive tilak (forehead-marking) composed of three horizontal lines. Shiva is associated with death and dissolution, and frequents cremation grounds. He is associated with the city of Varanasi, the most sacred Indian city to Hindus. The Ganges River flows through Varanasi, and it is the aspiration of many devout Hindus to have their ashes scattered in the Ganges.
- Another common depiction of Shiva shows him with his family—his wife Parvati and his two sons. One of these sons is Ganesha, the very popular elephant-headed deity.
- Ganesha is known as the remover of obstacles and the guardian of entryways. Praying to him is said to bring good luck and success,

so many people worship him before embarking on a trip or a new venture.

- One of the best-known, most visually compelling images of Shiva is as Shiva Nataraja, the Lord of the Dance. He dances in a circle of flames, one foot on the ground and one off, showing that he is both within and transcending the world.
- The final representation of Shiva we will discuss is the lingam. A lingam is an object shaped like a pillar that represents Shiva's power. Many linga are set inside a yoni, which is shaped like a vulva.
- In Hinduism, there is a sense that female divine power, Shakti, is the active force of the cosmos; without it, the male deities would be powerless. The goddess can take many forms in Hinduism, from gentle and loving to playful and passionate to fierce and terrifying.
- Two of the most important goddesses are Durga and Kali. Durga is portrayed with numerous arms, many holding weapons, riding a lion and ready for battle. Kali is usually portrayed as dark with a long red tongue, blood dripping from her mouth, and wearing a necklace of skulls. She is considered a great protector.
- It is difficult for many Westerners to understand the appeal of the terrifying deities in Hinduism. Keep in mind that if God is behind



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Ganesha, a popular Hindu deity, is the god of beginnings and new ventures.

all phenomena, then the fearful aspects of existence—earthquakes, hurricanes, death—are parts of divine creation. Hindus, through these gods, face these realities directly.

The Worship of Deities

- There are many ways to worship deities. Some of the most simple involve repetitively chanting the name of the deity or a short mantra associated with the deity, often accompanied by the movement of mala beads, a South Asian “rosary.”
- Sound also plays an important role in worship. We can see from the importance of chanting within the tradition. One sound is more important than all others: the sacred Sanskrit syllable “Om.”
- The rituals that take place in Hindu temples and homes are called pujas, and a large part of these rituals can be seen as a hospitality ritual, in which the devotee acts as a host to welcome the deity.
- If you visit a Hindu temple, in the main prayer room, you will remove your shoes. You will either stand or sit on the floor to observe rituals. The worshipper can receive a tilak to represent the blessing received at the puja.
- Keep in mind that many, though not all, Hindus are vegetarian. This is in part due to the Hindu concept of ahimsa, or nonviolence. Almost all Hindus refuse to eat beef, as the cow is considered worthy of reverence and its killing is legally forbidden in most of India.
- There are frequent festivals in India. Diwali is the autumn harvest festival of lights. Holi is a spring festival with connections to the color and fertility of the season and also to the stories of the gods and themes of love, sex, and play.
- India also features many major pilgrimages, including the largest gathering on earth: the Kumbha Mela. This pilgrimage occurs at three-year intervals along sacred rivers, such as the Ganges.

- The path of devotion to the gods is vitally important to many Hindus. At the same time, there are other paths to liberation, from meditative introspection to selfless action to transformative knowledge.

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Sharma, *Our Religions*.

Smith, *The World's Religions*.

Van Vorst, *Anthology of World Scriptures*.

Questions to Consider

1. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of representing God in pictures or icons? How important are sensory experiences—sounds, smells, sights—in the worship of the divine?
2. How is it possible for such a diverse pantheon of Hindu gods to represent a single ultimate reality, Brahman?
3. Which of the Hindu gods would you choose to worship to connect you most closely with the divine?

Gita to Gandhi—Yogas and Modern Hinduism

Lecture 5

The conversation between the warrior-prince Arjuna and his charioteer Krishna became one of the most important scriptures in the Hindu tradition—the Bhagavad Gita. The text has had a powerful impact on Indian thinkers and activists for centuries, and it was one of the books most valued by Mahatma Gandhi as well as Western thinkers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Aldous Huxley.

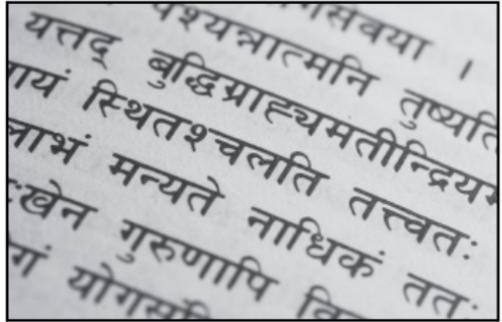
The Bhagavad Gita

- As Arjuna hesitates to fight, Krishna tells Arjuna that he must act in accordance with and only for the sake of his dharma. The message to the reader: Attachment to results brings desire, suffering, frustration, and anger. Rather, the disciplined person acts with commitment to duty.
- Krishna advises us that rather than being attached to the fruits of the action, the person performs the action as a sacrifice, offering up the action to the Lord.
- The climactic moment of the Gita occurs when Arjuna is given the opportunity to see Krishna in his entirety rather than through a single form—although he cannot do this with his own eyes (as our human eyes are too limited). He is given the divine eye, which makes it possible for a human being to see God directly.
- The text proceeds to describe the innumerable manifestations of Krishna, which completely overwhelm Arjuna. Arjuna wants to return to the familiar form. However, he—and we readers—know that this form serves as a focal point for our worship and a symbol that gestures beyond itself to the infinite.

Paths to Liberation—Yogas

- The Gita presents a range of paths to liberation—yogas. “Yoga” means to tie together, or as many people interpret it, to unite. This is why many define yoga as “union.”
- While there are many forms of yoga, four are featured most prominently in the Gita. The first is Karma Yoga, the yoga of action. The second form is Bhakti Yoga, the yoga of devotion. The third is Jnana Yoga, the yoga of knowledge. And the fourth is Raja Yoga, or “royal yoga,” the yoga of meditation.

- The physical practice of yoga that features poses and breathwork is not a focus of the Gita. That discipline, Hatha Yoga, developed later.



The Bhagavad Gita, written in ancient Sanskrit, has been one of the most influential texts of Hinduism from ancient times through today.

- The Gita focuses a great deal on Karma Yoga; it rejects the idea of renunciation as giving up action, as that would undermine dharma and the social and cosmic orders. One acts but renounces the results of action.
- Gandhi believed that the central teaching of the Gita is selfless action. He wrote, “I was not built for academic writings. Action is my domain. What I understand, according to my lights, to be my duty ... I do. All my action is actuated by the spirit of service.”
- To the Gita’s synthesis of action and renunciation is added yet another element: devotion. The renouncing of the fruits of action to the deity brings action, renunciation, and devotion together. The element of devotion to the gods, bhakti, becomes one of the primary features of Hindu religion.

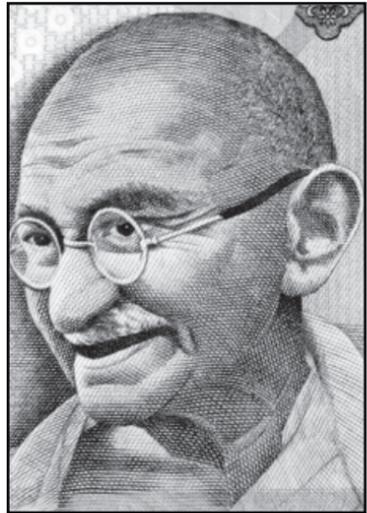
- In Jnana Yoga, the yoga of knowledge, it is important to point out that knowledge here is transformative knowledge, a “knowing” of the deepest, liberating truths.
- The school of Indian philosophy that has had the greatest impact on modern Indian and Western thought is Vedanta. This system of philosophy examines the nature of the soul and ultimate reality.
- Another school that has been profoundly influential is Advaita Vedanta, or “nondualistic Vedanta.” In this school, all of reality is one, and there is an identity between the individual soul, Atman, and ultimate reality, Brahman.
- Raja Yoga is the yoga of meditation, the contemplative path that leads the seeker through a series of practices that result in the direct experience of one’s soul. The essence of this path is summed up as “*yogas citta vritti nirodha*.” This means, “Yoga is the cessation of mental fluctuations” or “mental activity.”
- A very important theme is contained in this passage: the importance of stilling the mind through a contemplative practice. In quieting the mind, we can come to see our true identity, in this case the soul.
- Patanjali set up a system known as Ashtanga Yoga, which means eight-limbed yoga. The eight limbs are: (1) moral principles; (2) observances (including external and internal bodily purification); (3) posture; (4) breath control; (5) withdrawal of senses; (6) concentration; (7) meditation; and finally, (8) samadhi, or pure contemplation/absorption. This is the state of resting completely in the spirit, with the total quieting of mental fluctuations.
- In the eight-limbed system of Patanjali, the third limb was posture. But the yoga sutra only says that posture of yoga should be steady and easy. The notion here is that the body must be in a stable, relaxed state to practice the limbs of breath control and meditation.

- Centuries later, a form of yoga that focuses on postures and breath developed, which we know today as Hatha Yoga. The word “Hatha” means “effort,” so Hatha Yoga requires the application of energy and will.
- Although the system dates back far earlier, the most famous early text of the tradition is the 15th-century *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*. The text emphasizes that the poses, known as asanas, are not to be done for their own sake. Rather, they are to help one prepare to engage in Raja Yoga, the meditative path to liberation.
- Over time, systems of Hatha Yoga developed. Different poses had different effects: calming or energizing the body, helping with digestion, or healing illness. Yoga practice provides the benefits of strength, flexibility, and balance.
- The practice of yoga is connected with a particular understanding of anatomy. In the Indian system of anatomy, we have a subtle body of energy flow, in which our life force, or prana, flows along channels. These channels intersect at certain places in the body to create powerful centers, called chakras (circles/wheels). There is a chakra at the base of the spine, the genitals, the solar plexus, the heart, the throat and between the eyes.
- The chakra between the eyes corresponds with the “third eye,” a source of a higher consciousness or wisdom. This chakra is sometimes called *bindu* (point or dot), as is the spiritual or ornamental cosmetic dot that is applied there.
- Finally, there is a chakra at the crown of the head that is the site of higher consciousness and the attainment of union, which can be seen as the connection of female energy (shakti) with male energy (shiva), and the union of the human and divine. In kundalini yoga one learns to cultivate the energy at the base of the spine so that it moves up the chakras, awakening each as it uncoils (one feels heat and energy traveling up the body).

- Those who commit themselves to the pursuit of liberation often seek out a guru, a spiritual teacher and guide. Communities of disciples often practice together in an ashram, a compound of devotees under the leadership of a guru.

Hinduism and Recent Historical Change

- While Hinduism is one of the world's oldest religious traditions, it has been undergoing continuous transformation from the time of its origins. Some dramatic changes have occurred by encounters with Enlightenment Western thought. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, developments within Hinduism took the shape of what became known as the Hindu Renaissance.
- Members of the reform movement emphasized reason and rejected elements of Hinduism they considered unethical, superstitious, or backward, such as icon worship, child marriage, caste and untouchability, and sati (widow burning).
- Some of the changes in modern Hinduism happened as a result of British control of India, which ended with Indian independence in 1947. Many Indians, like Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi, wanted India to have a secular government that would not favor any religion.
- Some Indian nationalists emphasized Hindu solidarity, often with an anti-Muslim undercurrent. A member of this group assassinated



Mahatma Gandhi, although a deeply spiritual man, favored a secular government for the newly independent India.

Gandhi because he felt that Gandhi was too accommodating toward Muslims.

- This form of Hindu nationalism, some of which takes very strident, militant forms, is still alive in India today. However, it is important to remember that throughout most of India, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and others live peacefully side by side. Members of one religious tradition go to the temples and sacred sites of the other traditions. Hindus, for example, will often go to Sufi Islam shrines to receive blessings and pay homage.

Hinduism in South Asia and the West

- There is not a large community of converts to Hinduism in the West. Most Hindus are immigrants from India (or other parts of South Asia) and their children. In the West, Hindu parents must make a greater effort to maintain a connection with the community. Sunday schools and summer camps that teach Hinduism to children are increasingly common.
- While Hindu temples are very important, much of Hindu worship is based in the home. The homes of most observant Hindus have shrines to the deity or deities they worship. Pujas are performed every day, often by the oldest woman in the house. These pujas involve chanting mantras and offering flowers, food, incense, and light (*arati*) to the god.
- In India, people go to temples whenever they are moved to do so or on festival days. In America, many Hindu temples have adopted the weekly ritual schedule, with many temples offering Sunday worship given by knowledgeable members of the community, not by priests.
- The large Hindu temples in America feature virtually all of the most prominent deities, as they must serve Hindus from a range of backgrounds. The temple is not only a place for worship, but it is also a place for the community to come together.

- One religious movement arose from Hindu foundations and took on new forms in the West: the Hare Krishnas. This devotional movement centers on the practice of chanting as follows: Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare. Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.
- The movement was founded by Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada who, in 1965 at the age of 70, arrived in New York and attracted many followers. Among them was the Beatle George Harrison. In Harrison’s song, “My Sweet Lord,” you will hear the Hare Krishna chant in the background. After his death, Harrison’s ashes were scattered in the Ganges.
- The stream of Hinduism has undergone continuous change. If you attend a yoga class or talk about your karma, Hinduism has already had an impact on you. Hinduism is now truly a world religion.

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Questions to Consider

1. What do you think of the idea that there are different practices leading to liberation for people with different dispositions? Are you more drawn to practices based on action, contemplation, knowledge, or devotion? In what ways can these be combined?
2. Have you ever practiced Hatha Yoga? What was your experience of it? In what ways might a practice involving physical movements be considered a spiritual practice?
3. In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna says, "Be intent on action, not on the fruits of action. Be impartial to failure and success." What do you think of that idea? Is it an attainable goal? A desirable one?

Waking Up—The Buddha and His Teachings

Lecture 6

When most of us think of religion, we think of a God or gods, a divinely revealed text, and the concept of an eternal soul. Buddhism explicitly rejects these elements. For this reason, Buddhism challenges our very notion of what a religion is. Learning about Buddhism, therefore, expands our understanding of religion and the forms it can take.

A Way Out of Suffering

- What is it about Buddhism that has enabled it to transform the lives of countless millions of Asians and also enabled it to attract so many Jews and Christians, who often find it compatible with their monotheistic faiths? Buddhism claims to offer something that all of us dearly want—a way out of suffering.
- Buddhism is a tradition of tremendous diversity and many forms. When looking at the wide range of forms a tradition can take, we can ask, What elements unify a tradition, and what common features are shared among the many strands of Buddhism?

The Historical Buddha—Siddhartha

- One element that is shared by all Buddhists is a connection with the historical Buddha, born Siddhartha Gautama sometime in the 6th or 5th century B.C.E. The major themes of his story illustrate the central characteristics of Buddhism.
- There is no way of telling how historically accurate this story is. But what matters most is the meaning that this life story has had for millions of Buddhists throughout history. The story illustrates many of the most important Buddhist doctrines and practices.
- Because the Buddha's teachings were passed down orally for centuries before they were written down, they often feature

numbered lists, such as the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, to help in the process of memorization.

- In many of these stories, known as Jataka Tales, Siddhartha is an animal who illustrates an important Buddhist virtue and thus accumulates the merit (essentially good karma) necessary to achieve the rebirths that would lead to his precious human life, one that would bring to the world an enlightened being.
- Eventually, this chain of connected lives leads to a prince born to a ruler of a small kingdom near the border of Nepal and India in the Himalayan foothills. The place of his birth, Lumbini in modern-day Nepal, is a pilgrimage site for Buddhists.
- A sage made a prediction about Prince Siddhartha's future, but it was one with two possible paths: He would either grow up to be a powerful ruler like his father, or he would become a great spiritual leader.
- The sheltered 29-year-old prince eventually persuaded his father to let him see the parts of his kingdom outside of the palace walls. Despite his father's efforts to ensure a pleasant, uneventful, journey, Siddhartha had four encounters that would change his life. He first encountered an old person, then a sick person, and then a corpse.
- Those three encounters represent the moments of realization when we confront our mortality. In light of this knowledge, Siddhartha now knew what awaited him as we die and are then reborn, die and reborn again.
- The fuel that keeps us cycling through the system (and determines what kinds of rebirths we will have) is karma, the law of cause and effect. The cycle of birth and death, known as samsara, is characterized by suffering and is something that many religious seekers of the time sought to liberate themselves from.

- This quest for liberation is illustrated by the fourth encounter Siddhartha had: He saw a wandering renunciate; this showed Siddhartha that there are people pursuing liberation from the cycles of samsara. Siddhartha decided to leave his father's palace, a decision known as the Great Renunciation.

- From this moment, Siddhartha's quest was to find liberation from the cycle of suffering. He would find it, but not before he took two wrong, but instructive, turns. The first involved learning deep trance forms of meditation. As Siddhartha discovered, these states are temporary.



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The Buddha was born Prince Siddhartha Gautama, a young man of wealth and privilege, who turned his back on earthly power to seek spiritual liberation.

- The second path was one of severe asceticism. This was the attempt to conquer suffering by willing oneself to endure austerities, facing increasing deprivation and self-denial. Siddhartha virtually stopped eating, but he discovered that this path, too, did not give him the answers he sought.
- Siddhartha eventually made his final stand by sitting in front of a tree (which will become known as the bodhi tree, tree of awakening) and refusing to move until he had gained liberation. In a story that evokes elements of the life of Jesus, he had to face temptation.

- After overcoming this trial, Siddhartha began to enter deeper and deeper states of meditation, developing insights along the way. He then saw the way out, the gate through which he could enter into a new way of being in the world, a way free from suffering. He was transformed.
- His attainment, which, like all ultimate religious states within any tradition, must inevitably be discussed in terms of metaphor. (1) He was enlightened. (2) “He woke up.” He woke up from a life of delusion and suffering to a way of truly seeing reality for the first time. (3) He attained nirvana.
- The site of his awakening became the second major pilgrimage site in Buddhism.
- At this point in the story, the Buddha has awakened. This brings us to the essential question: What did he wake up to? Here we come to the traditional formulation of the most fundamental teaching of Buddhism: the Four Noble Truths.

The Four Noble Truths

- The first Noble Truth is that “life is *dukkha*.” One way to understand the First Noble Truth is as follows: “Life, as we ordinarily live it, is unsatisfactory.” We never have everything we want, and we are therefore perpetually discontented. Everything we have, we can lose, so our sense of happiness is always accompanied by an undercurrent of anxiety that anything can change at any moment.
- This state is not inevitable. It has a cause that can be addressed, as its origin is in something that we do. This brings us to the Second Noble Truth.
- *Dukkha* is caused by our grasping, our craving. To see why grasping is such a problem, we have to keep in mind the Buddhist view of the world: Everything is impermanent. When we grasp at a world like this, we can never be satisfied.

- Of all the things in the world, what we grasp at most is our self. This brings us to perhaps the most radical teaching in Buddhism: the no-soul or no-self doctrine. Buddhism denies a permanent, unchanging self. The stable self and the sense of separateness are illusions that cause so much of our suffering.
- We now have learned the Buddhist teaching of the three marks of existence, or dharma seals. These are the three characteristics of all reality: impermanence, no-self, and *dukkha*.
- The good news: Dukkha can stop. This is the truth of cessation. The Fourth Noble Truth is the way out of dukkha—the Noble Eightfold Path. The eight aspects of the path are often grouped into three categories.
- The first category focuses on the importance of seeing the world in the right way. This involves two steps on the path: right view and right intention. The next three steps are right action, right speech, and right livelihood. The final three steps are in the category of meditation: right effort, right concentration, and vipassana meditation—meditation aimed at insight through mindfulness.
- Vipassana meditation differs in important ways from the absorption meditations the Buddha had mastered in the forests. Vipassana meditation is paying attention and seeing things clearly that liberates us from the self-imposed suffering created by our own minds.

Mindfulness

- This practice is addressed by The Buddha in the Satipatthana Sutra, the “Foundations of Mindfulness.” He begins by saying, “This is the only way for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the attainment of nirvana, namely the foundations of mindfulness.” The first foundation is mindfulness of the body, which begins with awareness of the breath.

- In mindfulness meditation, you observe all phenomena as they arise—your thoughts, emotions, body sensations—without getting caught up in them, identifying with them, or pushing them away. The meditator does not judge, but rather simply observes.
- The first noble truth is the diagnosis of our condition. We are all suffering from *dukkha*. The second noble truth is the origin of the disease—our *dukkha* is caused by grasping. The third noble truth is the good news that our condition is treatable. And the fourth noble truth is the prescription—the eightfold path.
- Since the problem can be seen as psychological (our mind creates our suffering), and the practice that addresses the problem is observational and empirical, the approach has been seen as rational and in accord with scientific worldviews in the West today.
- This is one reason why Jews and Christians find it largely compatible with their religion of birth. Practitioners of meditation are not required to accept any particular supernatural claims about the world; they are simply asked to observe their minds and bodies, to follow their breath and pay attention.

Creating the Sangha

- When we last left Siddhartha—now the Buddha—he had understood the nature of reality and liberated himself from suffering. Now he could simply enjoy a life free of discontent and mental anguish. Here, it is said that one of the gods told him that some human beings would respond. The Buddha devoted the rest of his life walking around India, teaching the body of knowledge and practice known as the dharma.
- His first sermon (or sutra) set this process in motion and is thus called “Setting in Motion Wheel of the Dharma” (the content of which we have been discussing here, such as the Four Noble Truths). The wheel—with eight spokes for the eightfold path—is an important Buddhist symbol.

- We have now been introduced to what Buddhists know as the Three Jewels: the Buddha, the Dharma (his teaching), and the sangha (the community of Buddhist practitioners). When people become Buddhist or join a monastery, they recite the refuge formula, whereby they take refuge in these three jewels.
- At the age of 81, the Buddha died. The site of his death in Kushinagar is the fourth main pilgrimage site.
- The Buddha taught that our mental suffering is self-created. The discontent we experience is created by our clinging, which can be ended by waking up to the right perspective, living a moral life, and practicing meditation.

Suggested Reading

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Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ*.

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Rāhula, *What the Buddha Taught*.

Sharma, *Our Religions*.

Smith, *The World's Religions*.

Van Voorst, *Anthology of World Scriptures*.

Questions to Consider

1. What did the Buddha mean when he said that grasping or attachment causes *dukkha* (dissatisfaction or suffering)? Do you agree? Can you think of some examples?
2. How can the simple practice of sitting still and focusing awareness on the breath help to liberate a person from suffering?

Vehicles to Nirvana—The Schools of Buddhism

Lecture 7

Buddhism today is a religion of hundreds of millions of people who live in virtually every region of the world. The path to Buddhism's becoming a world religion began when a group of disciples who followed the Buddha developed into a community of monks, known as the sangha, which continued to grow after the Buddha's death.

Major Buddhist Divisions

- The Buddhist world is divided into three major schools, known as vehicles. They are Theravada Buddhism in South and Southeast Asia; Mahayana in East Asia; and Vajrayana in Tibet, Bhutan, and other parts of South and Central Asia.
- Theravada Buddhism sees itself as the most authentic preserver of the historical Buddha. The name Theravada itself means “the doctrine of the elders.” The other forms of Buddhism, generally speaking, do not reject the teachings of Theravada Buddhism but rather build on them and expand them.

The Precepts

- All committed Buddhists—monks and laypeople—commit to rules called the Five Precepts. These are not harming, not stealing, not lying, no sexual impropriety (for monks, this requires celibacy; for laypeople, this means sex only within marriage), and no intoxicants that cause heedlessness.
- When a novice monastic is initiated, he receives five additional precepts: No eating after noon (one meal per day), no sleeping on elevated platforms, no adorning oneself, no attending entertainment, no handling money.
- A monk adheres to 227 precepts, which make up the monastic code. A nun adheres to 311. Children can take lower ordination as a

novice at a young age, in some cases seven or eight, although more often near 13. Higher ordination normally occurs around the age of 20. Only some remain monks throughout their lives.

- Some monasteries are built in forests, allowing the monks to meditate away from society. In urban monasteries, the monks will perform a range of functions, including teaching, healing, performing rituals, and providing guidance. Theravada monks receive their food by begging from laypeople, who gain positive karma—merit—by donating.
- A major annual holiday in Buddhist countries is called Vesak. During Vesak, which falls in May or June, Buddhist laypeople will affirm their adherence to the precepts. People gather in temples for rituals. Monks also give sermons to laypeople.

The Mahayana Tradition and the Great Vehicle

- The term “Mahayana,” which means “great vehicle,” was first used around the 1st century B.C.E. The main early use of the word “Mahayana” may have been to refer to a bodhisattva—a being who is on the path to Buddhahood. In the Mahayana tradition, the bodhisattva chooses to stay in the cycle of samsara to liberate other beings from suffering. Earlier schools, such as Theravada, were labeled “the small vehicle,” because only one being at a time achieved liberation.
- One of the most popular bodhisattvas is the bodhisattva of compassion, whose name in Sanskrit is Avalokiteshvara. Others include Manjushri, the bodhisattva of wisdom, and Maitreya, who will eventually become the Buddha for the next historical cycle.
- In Mahayana, many new sutras were accepted and became very important well after the Buddha’s death. These include the Lotus Sutra and the Heart Sutra.

The Lotus Sutra and the Heart Sutra

- The Lotus Sutra contains narratives with lessons about Buddhism that could be easily appreciated by laypeople. One of the

characteristics of Mahayana Buddhism is that laypeople can advance to enlightenment.

- One important parable tells of a doctor and his sons. The sons accidentally consume poison, and they become so confused that they will not take the antidote offered by their father. To shock them into the realization that they must take this medicine (and take responsibility for their own healing), the father leaves home and sends back word that he is dead. The stunned sons take the medicine and are cured.
- In Lotus Sutra parables we discover the remarkable Mahayana transformation of the conception of the Buddha. The Buddha had to lead us to believe something that was not really true for our own good—that he was an ordinary person who died. The human life of Siddhartha Gautama was a manifestation of a transcendent Buddha who takes human form to lead human beings to the path of liberation.
- The other important Mahayana sutra is the Heart Sutra. These sutras teach emptiness, or *shunyata*. This means “empty of inherent existence” or “empty of a separately existing essence.” This is closely related to the no-self doctrine. Everything is what it is only because it is composed of other things. Nothing exists on its own.
- The flip side of emptiness is another very important Mahayana concept—interdependence. This is the essence of the teaching—every object is linked with every other object in the universe. It all “inter-exists.”
- So emptiness doesn’t mean nothing exists, but rather it tells us how things exist—they exist emptily. If everything is empty, then Buddhism itself is empty! Emptiness acts as a deconstructing idea that helps to prevent grasping at anything, including Buddhism itself.

Vajrayana and Tantras

- The final vehicle is Vajrayana, which is known as the diamond or thunderbolt vehicle. The best-known version of this is Tibetan Buddhism, which developed around the 6th–7th centuries C.E. in India, and has its origin in texts called Tantras. Tantric texts contained esoteric teachings that often required initiation to be understood.
- One form of Tantra, the left-handed path, teaches that one can engage in traditionally forbidden practices on the path to liberation (you might have heard discussion of Tantric sex, for example). One uses desire to become free from desire. Because of the risks inherent in such an approach, one needs the guidance of a teacher so one would not be led astray.

The Three *M*'s

- While some forms of Buddhism have a more unadorned aesthetic and emphasize simplicity—such as Zen—Tibetan Buddhism features rich artistic representations. One of the major themes of Tibetan Buddhism is transmutation: One transforms oneself into a Buddha. To do this, a wide range of practices are drawn on.
- Some of the most prominent practices are the so-called three *M*'s: Mudras, which correspond to body, are gestures or positions that are most often made by the hands and fingers. Mantras, which correspond to speech, are sacred utterances that are repeated by the practitioner.
- The third *M* refers to mandalas. These correspond to mind. Mandalas are diagrams that contain concentric sets of circles and squares. Meditating on a mandala is a way to bring about wisdom and awakening in the mind; the creation of mandalas out of a variety of materials is itself a meditative practice.
- Because of the esoteric nature of this form of Buddhism, people must be initiated into the practices. There are many preliminary practices. These can include 100,000 prostrations, or 100,000

recitations of a mantra. Through the initiation, the practitioner becomes connected with a guru who will be their spiritual guide.

- At the time of Buddhism’s arrival in Tibet (7th century C.E.), Theravada, Mahayana, and Tantric Buddhism all existed. The Tibetan approach has been to synthesize all of these forms together. Whereas Theravada Buddhism can be seen as “original” or “authentic” early Buddhism, Tibetan Vajrayana can be seen as “comprehensive” Buddhism.

Returning to the Cycle of Samsara—the Example of the Dalai Lama

- In Tibet, the choice to return to the cycle of samsara is more structured than in most Buddhist societies. Highly advanced beings choose to come back to help others decide on their rebirths. The most famous example in Tibet is the Dalai Lama.
- The 14th Dalai Lama is Tenzin Gyatso, which means that he is the 14th rebirth in this line. Dalai Lamas are considered to be manifestations of the bodhisattva of compassion (Chenrezig in Tibetan). So the Dalai Lama is seen as the living manifestation of compassion.
- Clues as to the identity of the new rebirth are received in many ways. First, the previous Dalai Lama might leave a clue as to where he intends to be reborn. This could occur while he is alive or even after his death.
- When candidates are found, they are tested. If the child being tested identifies items that belonged to the previous Dalai Lama, that is a sign. The child is also confirmed by an oracle, after which he is educated and trained in a wide range of areas, including philosophy, traditional medicine, ritual, and the arts.
- The 14th Dalai Lama was enthroned at the age of 15, when the newly created Communist People’s Republic of China was asserting sovereignty over Tibet. In 1959, following a Tibetan uprising against China, the Dalai Lama and other Tibetans went into exile,

eventually setting up a government in Dharamsala, India, where they remain to this day.

- Until 2011, the Dalai Lama was both the spiritual and temporal leader of the Tibetan people. In 2011, the Dalai Lama gave up his temporal authority so there would be a democratically elected prime minister, although the Dalai Lama retains his position as spiritual leader. For most Tibetans, he continues to serve as the symbol of the Tibetan people and is worshipped as a living bodhisattva.
- On the first day of the Tibetan New Year's celebration, called Losar, the Dalai Lama receives offerings, and wishes are made for his long life so that he can continue to serve his people.

The Tibetan Book of the Dead

- In Tibetan Buddhist thought, we are always moving from one state to another. But there are certain intersections between states that are



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Urban Buddhist monasteries perform a range of functions in their communities, including teaching, healing, performing rituals, and providing spiritual guidance.

particularly potent—for example, the line between wakefulness and sleep, between ordinary consciousness and meditative states, and between life and death.

- These in-between states are called Bardos. Tibetans focus a number of practices on navigating these powerful in-betweens, as they offer opportunities for seeing into the true nature of reality and attaining wisdom.
- Tibetans believe that after death, one enters the postdeath Bardo state, where one exists in a form known as a *bardowa*, usually for 49 days (seven rounds of seven-day existences).
- The Tibetan Book of the Dead is a travel guide for the recently deceased. The book aims to get the person to accept death, to let go of attachments to this world, and ultimately to recognize their true nature as pure awareness, seen as light. One can thus be liberated from the cycle of rebirth.

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De Bary, *The Buddhist Tradition in India, China & Japan*.

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Mitchell, *Buddhism: Introducing the Buddhist Experience*.

Powers, *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism*.

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Smith, *The World's Religions*.

Swearer, *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia*.

Van Voorst, *Anthology of World Scriptures*.

Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism*.

Questions to Consider

1. How do the Buddhist Five Precepts compare to the Biblical Ten Commandments? What do the differences tell us about morality in Buddhism as opposed to biblical religions?
2. Choose an object that is important to you and trace as many links as you can from it to the rest of the universe. Do you agree with Thich Nhat Hanh that reality is characterized by interbeing? What are the ethical implications of this view?
3. What do you think of the idea that our lives can be understood as a series of in-betweens?

Chinese Religion and Cosmology

Lecture 8

Chinese understandings of the cosmos have influenced all of East Asia—and the rest of the world. Before studying the particular religious traditions of China—Confucianism, Daoism, Chan Buddhism, and Pure Land Buddhism—we must look at the cosmological beliefs and folk traditions that have shaped the Chinese worldview for millennia.

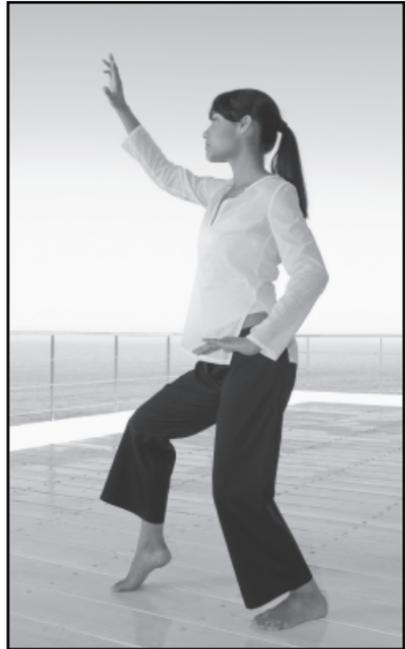
The Chinese Worldview—Elements, Cycles, and Qi

- China remains a primarily agricultural society. In the traditional Chinese worldview, the universe has regularities and patterns, but there is no deity or lawgiver in charge of it all. The most basic pattern involves two forces, yin and yang. The natural world can essentially be understood through the ceaseless interplay of these two forces.
- In Chinese thought, each side of the complementary pair exists because the other exists, and each flows into the other in continuous cycles. The ideal in Chinese thought is not about one side conquering the other but rather achieving the proper balance between the two.
- At the next cosmological level, we move from two forces to five. These are the *wuxing*, often translated as the Five Elements, but better understood in dynamic terms as the Five Processes or Five Phases. Since they refer more to dynamic qualities rather than static substances, we can think of them as watery, earthy, woody, metallic, and fiery. These are also in a perpetual cycle of transformation.
- Many different associations are made with the Five Processes—colors, compass directions, body organs, animals, seasons, flavors, musical notes, et cetera. In this way of thinking, to explain something is to locate it within a pattern. By understanding

how these correlations work, people can understand how the cosmos functions, act effectively in the world, and create and restore balance.

- Since the five processes operate in a cycle, we understand how things change over time by looking at the stages of the cycle. There are two basic cycles—the cycle of conquest and the cycle of generation. The cycle of conquest is driven by one element overcoming the next. In the cycle of generation, wood catches fire, fire reduces to ash (earth), the earth forms metal, metals melt to liquid, and water nourishes the growth of wood.
- Qi is one of the most important Chinese metaphysical concepts. It has been translated as “vital force,” “vital energy,” and “cosmic breath.” Qi is thought to be circulating within our bodies and the natural world.
- Qi bridges the divide between the physical, mental, and spiritual. When we get upset and stirred up, there are physical manifestations (our complexion changes, perhaps turns red). This is Qi rising within us.
- Traditional Chinese healers believe that Qi runs throughout our body in paths called meridians. These can be occluded, which can affect our energy and cause illness. Acupuncture is said to open up the meridians so that the Qi can circulate freely.
- The practice of taijiquan (popularly known as tai chi) involves a slow, flowing series of poses that combine breath and movement in such a way as to cultivate Qi for health, longevity, and self-defense.
- Qi is also part of the natural world. Fêng shui, which means “wind and water,” is known primarily as a system for determining the best locations and orientations for structures or objects. The fêng shui expert determines the flow and strength of Qi in a particular area and advises people how to locate their homes, businesses, graves, or other structures to take advantage of the Qi.

- Companies and architects in many parts of the world consult fēng shui masters to ensure an auspicious location and arrangement of their buildings. Also popular in the West, owners of homes and businesses often hire fēng shui consultants to rearrange the interior of their buildings to maximize energy and flow.
- Thus, the Chinese conception of the cosmos can be understood as all parts of the cosmos interconnected with others like an organism. Problems in the world arise not because there is some evil force that needs to be eliminated; rather, problems arise only when things are out of balance.
- The earliest Chinese sources do not focus on the creation of the universe. The Chinese are concerned with life here on earth, with culture, with what makes us human and enables us to live in families and communities.



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The discipline of taijiquan (tai chi) is derived from the ancient Chinese cosmological belief in Qi, or vital energy.

The Supernatural: Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors

- When it was time to choose a successor, the mythological emperor Yao did not select his own son, but instead looked for the most worthy man in the empire, who was Shun. Yao is revered because he put virtue over nepotism. Shun's most defining characteristic was filial piety, the quality of honoring and faithfully serving one's

parents. Shun also chose the most worthy successor, Yu, who was known for his tireless dedication and self-sacrifice. Chinese heroes are revered for two reasons—their contributions to culture and their morality.

- Most Chinese people throughout history have believed in a host of supernatural beings, and these can generally be arranged into three categories—gods, ghosts, and ancestors.
- One group of gods is found at the most local level, such as the kitchen god or stove god. This god is usually represented by his picture over the stove in a family kitchen.
- The next level up is the Tudi Gong, the earth god, who protects the village from ghosts and receives reports on the goings-on in the village. Above the earth god is the city god, and at the highest level of the bureaucracy is the Jade Emperor. Just as we contact our mayor or local representative first, so the Chinese interact with their local gods more than those higher up.
- In addition to this divine bureaucracy, there are other kinds of deities in the Chinese pantheon, including Daoist gods as well as buddhas and bodhisattvas.
- The fact that each year the image of kitchen god is burned and replaced tells us that the Chinese, like the Indians, do not actually worship the image. The image is, in a sense, a receptacle in which the spirit of the deity resides.
- The Chinese pantheon is very syncretic, bringing together the gods of the divine bureaucracy, divinized historical characters, and powerful beings from Daoism and Buddhism. There is also another set of important supernatural beings who can play a helpful role in human lives. These are the ancestors.
- In general, ancestors are seen as helping the living family members and serving as the family representative in the spirit realm. But if

an ancestor is angered by being neglected—or if the living family members go against the wishes of the ancestor—the ancestor can bring bad luck on a family.

- Each year during the Qing Ming festival, Ancestor’s Day or Grave-Sweeping Day, Chinese families visit ancestral graves to clean and maintain them, and to offer sacrifices. This day, which falls in early April, is a national holiday in much of the Chinese world.
- Traditionally, the ancestral line in China is patrilineal, going through the male side. The altar will be set up so as to distinguish between honored ancestors in the direct lineage and indirect contributors or members of collateral lines. Traditionally, daughters join the ancestral line of their husbands.
- The final type of supernatural being is the ghost, or *gui*. While the gods and ancestors are generally honored and worshipped, ghosts must be propitiated and held at bay. You make offerings to ghosts so that they will leave you alone.
- On the 15th day of the 7th lunar month of the Chinese calendar (falling in August or September of the Western calendar), the ghost festival is held. Food is left out for ghosts, incense is burned in front of the door, “joss money” (special money for use in the spirit world) is burned for the dead, and performances are put on. At these performances, seats in the front row are left empty for the ghosts.
- In many cases, ghosts are deceased humans who are not cared for by the living. In China, the relationship between family members does not end when one of them dies; it just changes. This is also a reason that Chinese parents consider it so important for their children to give them grandchildren. Not having a family of one’s own is considered very unfilial toward one’s parents.
- In addition to deceased family members who are not cared for, ghosts can also be people who died under mysterious or unfortunate circumstances, such as meeting a violent death, drowning, or

suicide. The unhappy, restless spirit can dwell in the area near where it died and cause problems for the living.

Telling the Future and Providing Good Fortune

- For well over 3,000 years, divination has been used to determine the course of events, receive guidance for decisions, and shape the future. One of the oldest forms of divination used what are known as oracle bones, which involved writing and cracks made on tortoise shells and cattle bones.
- Over time oracle bones fell out of favor, and people began to use a classic divination text, the Yi Jing (“The Classic of Changes”), which is still widely used today. The Chinese have long believed that the Yi Jing could explain the workings of the cosmos, provide wisdom and guidance, and help people understand the way that events were unfolding so that they could act most effectively.
- Many Chinese also pay close attention to the significance of lucky or unlucky numbers. A number’s status is related to its sound, which can be a homonym for another word. Eight (*ba*), for instance, is a very lucky number, since in some dialects it sounds like the word for “prosper” or “get rich.” The number four (*si*), on the other hand, is very unlucky, since it sounds like the word for “death.”
- The most widely celebrated holiday, the Chinese New Year, falls between late January and mid-February. This is a time of year for cleaning house and giving gifts. On New Year’s Day, children receive money in red envelopes (red being a lucky color) from older family members.

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Van Voorst, *Anthology of World Scriptures*.

Questions to Consider

1. How does the Chinese ideal of harmony, represented by the yin-yang symbol, compare with Western ideals of competition and victory? What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of these worldviews?
2. How important are your ancestors to you? How do you maintain connections with your ancestors? Is there a sense in which you think of or “consult” your ancestors when making important decisions?
3. What do you think of the practice of fēng shui, by which the placement and orientation of buildings (or of the furniture within them) is said to have an impact on human well-being and fortune?

Confucianism—Rituals and Relationships

Lecture 9

Two most important indigenous traditions from China are Confucianism and Daoism. In *The Analects of Confucius*, a passage reads, “Confucius would not sit unless his mat was straight.” Why does one of the most influential books ever written, a book that articulated a worldview that transformed all of East Asia, concern itself with how Confucius sat? If we understand that, we get an important clue to understanding Chinese—and all of East Asian—culture.

Confucius and the *Analects*

- Many scholars agree that the strongest force shaping East Asian culture is still Confucianism, and therefore one must understand Confucian values in order to understand East Asia. To do this, we must start with this little book, *The Analects of Confucius*, written by disciples recalling the master’s words and conversations, and consider how it shaped the Chinese imperial bureaucracy.
- Confucius’s surname was Kong, and his given name was Qiu. He was given the honorific title Master, which is Fuzi in Chinese. So he was known as Kong Fuzi, or the shorter form, Kongzi. When Jesuits were translating Chinese names, they Romanized Kong Fuzi as Confucius. Confucius is most commonly used in the West, but Kongzi is more accurate.
- Confucius was born in 551 B.C.E. in the state of Lu, the modern Chinese Shandong province. He lived during a time of great chaos. Rulers of different states fought each other for supremacy, often raising large armies capable of tremendous brutality. The rulers invited philosophers from different schools to hear the best ideas of the day and select advisors.
- Confucius and many of his rivals would journey around China trying to persuade rulers to hire them or implement their ideas.

Along the way, Confucius gathered many disciples. His willingness to accept anyone who wanted to learn and his broad-based approach to education were innovations. He is revered for virtually creating the role of teacher, and Confucius's birthday is celebrated as Teacher's Day in Taiwan.

- The *Analects* is considered a foundational text for a major religious tradition in that, unlike the texts that we have seen in Hinduism and Buddhism, was concerned more than anything else about our life on this earth. This does not mean that Confucius never talked about death, but the concern is solely on how death impacts us in this life.
- In the time of chaos in which he lived, there were many approaches to restoring order and social harmony. Confucius believed there was a time during the reign of the great sage-kings when there was perfect order in society. If we can restore the practices and values of that golden age, we can bring back a harmonious, flourishing society. Confucius looked for answers in history, and a reverence for the past is a central feature of Confucian thought.
- For this reason, the lessons of history must be learned, and learning is one of the most important practices in Confucian thought. Confucius emphasized learning and study rather than introspection and intuition.

The Plan of Study and Social Order

- Confucius developed a program that focused on the five classics, which included a book of odes, a book focused on ritual practices, two books of history, and the Yi Jing. Studying these texts was important for two reasons: It was a central component of the path to self-cultivation, and it gave people a body of common knowledge, therefore unifying China through a common cultural inheritance.
- Ultimately, learning was a way to develop one's character with the ultimate goal of becoming a cultivated person and, if possible, a sage. Along with learning from the classics, there is another key component to the Confucian self-cultivation program—ritual (li).

People who had internalized the li would be able to navigate every possible situation.

- In a deep sense, ritualization is necessary for becoming fully human and living among others in society. Ritual both cultivates and expresses the right attitudes and feelings. Ritual also brings people together in communities. When someone violates the ritual, there are ritualized ways of letting a person know.
- Confucius saw ritual and virtue as superior to law. In healthy communities, day-to-day order is kept through ritual, and conflicts are adjudicated through ritual. By the time people invoke law and punishment, there has already been a breakdown in order. In other words, if people have internalized the proper attitudes, there is no need for legal remedies and threats of punishment to keep them in line.
- Now we are in a position to see why the *Analects* contains the passage: “Confucius would not sit unless his mat was straight.” For the Confucian, everything people do says something about their character. Doing those things the proper way throughout one’s life is a way to cultivate the proper character.

Virtues in Confucian Culture

- Over time, through learning and ritual, as well as aesthetic practices such as music and dance, a person cultivates virtues. Confucians, like classical Greeks, focus on virtues, and as one cultivates



Confucius was, above all, a teacher of ethics, ritual, and law.

virtues, Confucians believe one develops a certain kind of moral power, including the ability to influence others. They called this *de*, a word for virtue that also has the meaning of power. For Confucians, it is a kind of moral charisma. This is the quality that good rulers need to possess.

- What virtues were important for Confucius? One of the key virtues is *xiao*, filial piety, honoring and properly serving one's parents. Other important virtues are loyalty and reciprocity. But there is one virtue that is the highest virtue: *ren*, which is often translated as "benevolence." In other words, *ren* can be seen as "person-to-person"-ness, the virtue of co-humanity, being a human being among other human beings.
- Ultimately, this is what it is all about: human relationships. Ritual, family, character cultivation—all of these take place within relationships. For Confucians, we are who we are because of whom we have loved, lived with, and learned from. The self is fully relational. A person is best understood as a nexus of relationships.
- For Confucians, to know me is to know these relationships that matter to me and make me who I am. For me to be a good person means learning to be a good son, husband, father, teacher, and so on.

The Key Relationships and Hierarchy

- Confucians emphasized five key relationships: parent-child, husband-wife, elder brother-younger brother, ruler-subject, and friend-friend. Confucian feminists are working to rid Confucianism of its patriarchy.
- Confucians believe that hierarchy is important to maintain proper order and a healthy society. For Confucians, this is far better than a false egalitarianism that blurs boundaries that should be maintained. This is an important point if one wants to understand East Asian culture. When you are in East Asia, address people formally unless told otherwise.

- Confucians offer us a different understanding of society. There must be a leader, a conductor, who we all follow. And we must have a great score to play from—in the Confucian case, this is provided by the sage-kings of the past. This image is not of a competitive society but rather of a cooperative enterprise.

The Modern Influence of Confucianism

- There have been dramatic political, social, and cultural changes in East Asia, particularly from the 19th century until today. Still, scholars have argued that Confucianism continues to be one of the most important cultural forces in countries like South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, and Japan.
- One study tried to determine just how Confucian the country of South Korea is. South Koreans care deeply about the cardinal Confucian virtues; they maintain the veneration of ancestors and sages and the importance of the family and tradition. They practice Confucian rituals, such as the extended mourning period for parents and memorial ceremonies. They are deeply Confucian even if they don't self-identify as such.
- The study also found that 97 percent of people indicating “no religion” on the survey were actually Confucian. What is more, 80 percent of Protestants and 77 percent of Buddhists were found to be “Confucianized” Protestants and Buddhists. Since Confucianism is generally tolerant toward other religions, people are able to combine Confucian values and practices with other religious commitments.
- In fact, some scholars say that one must understand Confucianism to understand the way that capitalist economies developed in places like South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Japan.
- East Asia's Confucian Capitalism featured family-centered companies and strong government guidance in industry; a group orientation that focuses on consensus building and the sharing of responsibilities and rewards; an emphasis on frugality that led to greater savings rather than consumption; a focus on the long-term

rather than on quarterly profits; and a strong commitment to human investment (an educated, skilled work force).

- One of the notable features of mainland China in recent years is the revival of Confucianism in politics and everyday life. Confucianism is being taught in schools, universities, and corporations. One of the most remarkable signs of this revival is the immense popularity of Yu Dan's book *Reflections on the Analects*. In the book, she tries to show that Confucianism can teach us how to live in the modern world.
- Major Chinese political leaders have used Confucian themes and quotations in their speeches. Some commentators theorize that the Chinese government is using Confucianism to promote stability and order on a traditional Chinese basis.
- Confucianism is now a world religion, as it has traveled wherever East Asians have traveled. It is having an increasing impact on the West, as seen in the phenomenon that some call "Boston Confucianism."
- Confucianism can help temper American individualism and foster a greater sense of family and community. America's contribution to Confucianism can include bringing a stronger feminist perspective and placing a greater emphasis on diversity.
- Confucianism sees the sacred in our everyday lives. Tradition, culture, education, the arts, and human relationships—above all, family—are worthy of our reverence. Confucians would say that devoting your time to learning—as you are doing now—is itself a spiritual practice.

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De Bary, Bloom, and Lufrano, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*.

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Ivanhoe and Van Norden, *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*.

Jochim, *Chinese Religions: A Cultural Perspective*.

Matlins and Magida, *How to Be a Perfect Stranger*.

Neville, *Boston Confucianism*.

Paper and Thompson, *The Chinese Way in Religion*.

Sharma, *Our Religions*.

Smith, *The World's Religions*.

Thompson, *Chinese Religion*.

Tu, *Humanity and Self-Cultivation*.

Van Voorst, *Anthology of World Scriptures*.

Yao, *An Introduction to Confucianism*.

Questions to Consider

1. What do you think of the approach to life implied by the sentence, “Confucius would not sit unless his mat was straight”?
2. Two of the most important Confucian values are learning and relationships. How important are these to you? Are there values you consider more important? What virtues do you consider most important for a cultivated person to possess?
3. Do you believe, with Confucius, that ritual is a better way to preserve order than law? In what sense is it true that we become fully human by mastering ritual?

Daoism—Harmony, Nature, and the Way

Lecture 10

It has been said that the Dao De Jing, the enigmatic text of the Chinese Daoist tradition, is the second most translated book in the world, after only the Bible. The first line of this influential text reads, “The Dao that can be spoken is not the eternal Dao.” The text reminds us that there are things that cannot be explained in words.

What Is Daoism?

- The word “Daoism,” which is used to refer to one of the two most important indigenous Chinese religious traditions (the other being Confucianism), actually describes a great variety of things.
- The first form is often called philosophical Daoism, or classical Daoism. The two most influential texts of this tradition are the Dao De Jing and the Zhuangzi, and together they have had a profound impact on all of East Asian religion. The second form of Daoism has a sectarian character. This form is often called religious Daoism, or liturgical Daoism because of the significance of ritual.
- The Dao De Jing was probably written down some time in the 3rd century B.C.E., but its sayings most likely coalesced over a long period of time. It is attributed to the author Laozi. Nobody really knows who Laozi was or if he even existed. We conventionally speak of Laozi as a person, and he is often depicted as an old, white-haired man riding an ox. In the later Daoist religious sects, he attains a far more elevated, even divinized status, gaining the title Great Lord Lao on High.
- Within the name of the text, the last word, Jing, just means “classic.” The word “Dao” means “way” or “path,” and it can mean the right path, the way that things should be done. Another meaning is more metaphysical—the Dao is seen as the way of the cosmos, the pattern and rhythm of nature.

- The word De also appears in the *Analects of Confucius*. De means virtue, and in the *Analects* this had the meaning not only of moral character, but also the power and influence that one acquires when one possesses goodness. Some prefer to translate the word as “power,” drawing on the older meaning of “virtue” from the Latin *virtus*. Thus, Dao De Jing means “The Classic of the Way and its Power” or “The Classic of the Way and Virtue.”
- The text, a collection of 81 short, enigmatic, often poetic chapters, is evocative and suggestive rather than direct. Nevertheless, there are a number of important themes that arise in the text. The text frequently takes aim at the human proclivities toward pride, greed, violence, and excess. It advocates a life of simplicity and contentment.
- While the Confucians emphasize acquiring knowledge and following tradition and rituals, the Daoists advocate returning to a more natural state. To achieve this, people have to rid themselves of the learning, ritualized way of acting and the overall artifice that they have internalized from their cultures.

Wu Wei and De

- The ideal state is known as wu wei, which can be translated as “nonaction.” It means no striving activity, no activity driven by goal-oriented, conscious, intentional planning. It can be thought of as effortless action.
- When people realize the ideal of wu wei they act in a way that is *ziran*, which literally translates as that which is “so of itself” but is often translated as “spontaneous,” and it means acting in such a way that is natural to who you are.
- If people get out of the way and stop trying to meddle in things so much, things will unfold in accordance with the natural Dao. Without human interference, the Dao can do its harmonizing work, bringing about order. The ultimate goal is to live in harmony with the Dao.

- So we can think of Dao as the underlying natural order, the pulse and rhythm of the natural world, the creative, harmonizing force that gives rise to our world.
- In addition to a mother figure and a female, there are other symbols for the Dao in the Dao De Jing that illuminate what Dao refers to. One symbol is water, for it flows through things without confronting them, nurtures things, and although it is soft, it ultimately triumphs over the hard by wearing it down.
- Virtue, or De, in the Dao De Jing generally refers to the natural power that one receives from the Dao. If we preserve and nurture what the Dao gives us instead of wearing it away with striving and effort, we will live a long life in accordance with nature.
- The Dao De Jing is advocating opting out of that whole race and seeking contentment in small communities that live simply and well (the text does not advocate asceticism, only the avoidance of excess).

Zhuangzi

- Zhuangzi, the 4th-century B.C.E. Daoist thinker, was a perspectivist, meaning that he believed one's view will always depend on one's perspective. Zhuangzi thought all philosophical arguments can be seen this way. He was also skeptical about our senses and our ability to know what is real and what is not.
- We find clues to Zhuangzi's ideal way of living in his book. All of Zhuangzi's skillful exemplars are able to get their minds out of the way so that they can be fully absorbed in the activity and follow along with the natural way of things. In other words, they have mastered effortless action, wu wei.
- One way to get the mind out of the way—in a sense to get ourselves out of the way—is through absorption in an activity. Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi called this experience “the flow state,”

and it enables human beings to attain optimal experiences. Others call this being “in the zone.”

- In addition to losing oneself in skillful activity, Zhuangzi also points to meditation techniques that help get the mind out of the way so that one can enter into a wu wei state. There is, it seems, a letting go of one’s concept of oneself, the self-image one has acquired over time, so that nature can manifest itself.
- Zhuangzi’s sages accept whatever transformations nature brings about, including death. The acceptance of change and transformation is a major theme in Zhuangzi’s text.

Confucianism versus Daoism

- There are many deep differences between Confucianism and Daoism. The Confucians emphasize learning, the Daoists unlearning. The Confucians put their arguments in rational language, the Daoists use riddles, poetry, and ambiguity. While the Confucians put human beings above all other beings, the Daoists see us as simply one being among the myriad.
- The Confucians emphasize duties and responsibilities, the Daoists freedom. Confucians emphasize the importance of remembering our ancestors, our past, our traditions. Zhuangzi values forgetting so that we can experience the moment-by-moment transformations of life.
- For the Confucians, life can be understood as a developing narrative. Zhuangzi, on the other hand, uses the phrase “free and easy wandering,” or “wandering without a destination” for how to move through life.
- Throughout the history of China, both of these worldviews have been embraced by the Chinese—and most East Asians—and have more often been seen as complementary rather than rivals. Confucianism applies more to our lives as students, members of families, working people, and politically involved people. Daoism

applies more to us as natural beings, beings who are seeking to find our place in the larger natural order and cosmos. Many Chinese throughout the centuries have tried to combine these traditions in their own lives in fruitful ways and both traditions have flourished for 2,500 years.

- The Confucians and Daoists have been the yang and yin of Chinese religion, and many Chinese thinkers have proposed trying to achieve a harmony of the two rather than the complete supremacy of either.

Changes over Time

- While the *Dao De Jing* and the *Zhuangzi* have had a tremendous influence on Chinese Daoism, Daoism is much more than the ideas and values contained in the classical texts.
- Numerous sects with their own leaders, texts, practices, and institutional structures have arisen in China over the past 2,000 years, and a number of Daoist groups can be found today in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and anywhere that Chinese communities live, including Europe and the United States.
- The earliest Daoist groups that made use of such texts can be traced back to the 2nd century C.E. One important Daoist movement is the Celestial Masters sect founded by Zhang Daoling, who claimed to have received a covenant from the deified Laozi in 142 C.E.
- The early Daoist groups were organized into units (like parishes), and they featured practices such as faith healing, recitation of sacred texts, and meditation.
- Over time, many Daoist individuals and groups pursued longevity or immortality. Some of the practices fall under two forms of alchemy—outer and inner. Outer alchemy involved the pursuit of an elixir of immortality. Inner alchemy involved meditation and breathing exercises (including the controlled circulation of Qi) that harmonize the energies in the body. In addition, there were sexual and dietary practices that promoted health and longevity.

- Daoist abbeys arose and ultimately enjoyed imperial patronage. One of the monasteries founded in the Tang Dynasty, Beijing's White Cloud Monastery, is still a functioning Daoist institution and is the seat of the Chinese Daoist Association. It is part of the Complete Perfection sect (Quan Zhen), which is over 700 years old. It also survives in Hong Kong today.

Groups and Rituals

- There are two strains within religious Daoism. In one, such as Quan Zhen, the result is in physical and spiritual transformation. The other form involves priests conducting community rituals. The dominant sect in this variety is the Zheng Yi (Orthodox Unity), which claims ties to the Celestial Masters tradition discussed earlier.
- One major type of Daoist ritual is called a *jiao*, in which a Daoist priest acts as a mediator with the spirit world to confer blessings on a community. Some of the ritual activities of the *jiao* include rituals of purification and repentance; reading of sacred texts, including the Dao De Jing; writing documents to the deities on behalf of the community; creating talismans to protect the community; and thanking and seeing off the gods. There is also music and dancing. Many of these elements are also seen in Daoist funerals.
- The Chinese traditions of Confucianism and Daoism have had a profound influence on Korea and Japan. Those cultures both have indigenous religious traditions—Shamanism and Shinto, respectively—that deal with the interactions between the human and spiritual realms.

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Thompson, *Chinese Religion*.

Van Voorst, *Anthology of World Scriptures*.

Zhuangzi and Graham, *Chuang-Tzŭ*.

Questions to Consider

1. What do you think of the ideal of effortless action? What kinds of activities put you into the flow state?
2. Both the *Dao De Jing* and the *Zhuangzi* feature language that is often elusive and puzzling. Why is this kind of language sometimes used in religious texts? How would you compare the Daoist uses of this kind of language with Jesus's use of parables?

3. Confucius stresses learning and responsibilities; Laozi and Zhuangzi stress unlearning and freedom. Which do you think is right? Can both of them be right? How can a life incorporate both Confucian and Daoist worldviews?

Kami and Spirits—Shinto and Shamanism

Lecture 11

Shinto is considered the oldest organized Japanese religious tradition. Prior to the entry of Confucian and Buddhist influences into Japan in the 6th century C.E., religion was mostly a local affair of decentralized, varied practices. The 7th and 8th centuries in Japan produced the two most important early texts, the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon Shoki*, presenting the founding myths of Shinto. Now Shinto is a far more organized tradition. However, many of the practices involve the deities, shrines, home altars, and purification in a nonorganized, local way.

The Importance of Kami

- One of the main elements in all forms of Shinto is the importance of the kami. The word “Shinto” itself means “the way of the kami.” Kami is often translated as “god” or “spirit,” but there are many kinds of kami. First, there are the mythological kami, the gods who are responsible for aspects of creation. There are also kami associated with particular activities, qualities, objects, or nature.
- The spirits of the dead can also be seen as kami, and influential historical figures can be considered important kami. People with power and charisma, such as religious or political leaders, great warriors, or artists, can achieve the status of living kami.
- Shinto is a tradition that is very much centered on the land and people of Japan, and it does not aspire to universality in the way that Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism do. This is why virtually all practitioners of Shinto are of Japanese ancestry.
- In the ancient Shinto texts, kami appear from a primordial chaos, and the two most important are Izanagi, the male, and Izanami, the female. From them, other important kami are born, including Amaterasu, the sun goddess, and Tsuki-yomi, the moon god.

- Ultimately, Amaterasu sends her grandson to the earth to rule there, giving him three sacred treasures. The treasures are said to represent wisdom (a mirror), courage (a sword), and benevolence (a jewel).
- One of the most important elements of the myth is that it establishes a link between the kami and the island and emperor of Japan. Japan was a direct creation of the kami, and emperors are considered direct descendants of Amaterasu, the sun goddess.

Worship at a Shinto Shrine

- The worship of kami is done either at shrines (*jinja*) or in the home, with a small version of a shrine called a *kamidana*. As with most forms of Asian religion, there is no weekly congregational worship. People visit a shrine whenever they are moved to do so. In addition, large numbers of people visit shrines on important festival days.
- One of the most distinctive architectural features of a Shinto shrine is the gateway, or torii. This consists of two poles and a crossbar



Takahashi Inari Jinja, a Shinto shrine in Kumamoto City, Japan, features the traditional torii entrance.

between them, and it signifies passing from the everyday world into the realm of the sacred. Home shrines often feature a small torii.

- There are two main parts to the shrine—a worship sanctuary, called a *haiden*, and an inner sanctum, called a *honden*.
- The inner sanctum, to which only priests are allowed access, contains what is called the *shintai*, an object into which the spirit of the kami descends. Typical *shintai* include mirrors, jewels, or naturally occurring objects like stones.
- The most important shrine in Japan is the Ise Shrine, the inner of which is dedicated to Amaterasu. Every 20 years, the inner shrine is destroyed and rebuilt with new wood. This process engages thousands of people in a series of rituals. The next two rebuilding years are 2013 and 2033.
- The Shinto priest is responsible for the upkeep of the shrine and for performing rituals for the kami.
- Home worship is done at the *kamidana*, which often contains some kind of *shintai* (often a small round mirror), along with a torii and other decorative elements, such as candles and wooden tablets. Worship, often performed daily, generally involves washing one's hands, making offerings, and offering prayers.
- In contrast to simple home worship are the dramatic festivals (*matsuri*) that can last for days. Some of the major Shinto festivals include an autumn festival celebrated at the Ise Shrine, where food is offered to Amaterasu. One of the most important is the Dai Jo Sai, the harvest festival performed at the accession of a new emperor.

Shinto's Role in Japanese History

- Shinto has long been involved with political authority in Japan, and during parts of the 19th and 20th centuries, this resulted in the official creation of State or National Shinto. In the 1860s, the government

created an Office of Shinto worship and required citizens to register at shrines. They made Shinto a national ideology.

- Over time, this developed into an ultranationalistic ideology that emphasized the superiority of Japan and the Japanese people. This movement provided the foundations for the expansionist doctrines that would lead ultimately to Japan's role in World War II.
- After the war ended, the Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in Tokyo issued a Shinto Directive that abolished State Shinto but protected shrine Shinto practice as part of religious freedom. There could be no government support for Shinto priests and shrines and no use of textbooks and edicts to indoctrinate the people. Finally, the emperor had to renounce his divinity.

The Shaman

- Throughout the world, religious specialists help to mediate the relationship between humans and spirits in very different ways from those seen in Shinto. Known as shamans, these men and women often alter their state of consciousness and travel to other realms to serve the community.
- Shamanism is one of the world's oldest and most widespread forms of religion. Today, there are shamans still practicing in virtually every part of the world. Some of the most commonly shared characteristics of shamanistic traditions provide concrete examples from two Asian traditions—Korean and Hmong.
- The term “shaman” comes from Siberia, meaning “a person who is moved or raised.” Shamans were important among many nomadic hunting and gathering communities, where they performed many functions: healer, medium, priest, diviner, sorcerer, and sage. To accomplish their jobs, shamans enter altered states of consciousness and make contact with gods or spirits.
- Some shamans, like those we will see in Korea, are more likely to call the deities down than to travel out to them. Shamans use a range

of different techniques to enter these states—dancing, drumming, fasting, and ingesting consciousness-expanding substances such as peyote, ayahuasca, or psilocybin mushrooms.

- There are two general methods to become a shaman. The first is heredity. The other is being chosen by the spirits. This calling is experienced through a shamanic illness. The person is understood to either accept the calling and become a shaman—at which point the symptoms will cease—or refuse the call and continue to suffer.

Korea's *Mudang* Shamans

- Most Korean shamans are women; female shamans are called *mudang*. In fact, not only are women the shamans, but most of the people who hire shamans and work with them are also women. It is estimated that there are 300,000 shamans in South Korea.
- *Mudang* perform rituals to heal the sick, bring good fortune to the home, and help ensure the well-being of villages. These rituals, known as *gut*, are a way to communicate with, propitiate, and please the spirits.
- There are many different kinds of shamanistic rituals. Some are seasonal and focus on the welfare and prosperity of the community. There are also rituals for crisis situations, like illness or the inability to conceive, and rituals for the dead. While many rituals are performed outdoors or in homes, there are also hundreds of shamanistic temples in South Korea.

What a Ritual Is Like

- In a typical ritual, the chief *mudang* is often accompanied by assistants, including a musical shaman who is responsible for percussive music. The shamans bring a great deal of colorful clothing and implements that they will wear when acting as a vehicle for the spirits, including flags, fans, and bells.
- During the rituals, the *mudang* will serve as a medium, entering into trance states and speaking on behalf of the spirit. Shamans

will often perform remarkable feats, including walking barefoot on swords without bleeding or holding heavy objects, like steaming pots of water, by their teeth. They will also perform divinations to determine whether things are unfolding in auspicious or inauspicious ways.

- While the most popular religions in South Korea are Buddhism and Christianity, shamanism still plays an important role. The government has called shamanistic rituals “intangible cultural assets.”
- Interestingly, despite the popularity of other religions, and the increasingly “rational” and technological aspects of parts of South Korean society in recent decades, shamanism is enjoying a resurgence. Many shamans now have websites, and one can have a divination performed by a shaman online.

The Hmong Shamans

- The Hmong are an ethnic group found largely in mountainous regions in China, in Southeast Asia, and increasingly in the United States. Many of the Hmong who lived in Laos during the Laotian Civil War of the 1950s–1970s fought against the communist Laotian and North Vietnamese forces, often on behalf of and supported by the CIA. After the communist victories, the Hmong were persecuted, leading many to move to refugee camps in Thailand and, ultimately, to the United States, where over 230,000 Hmong now live.
- To understand how Hmong shamans heal, we have to look at Hmong conceptions of illness and souls. The Hmong believe that a person has multiple souls, commonly seven. A soul can wander off during a dream and not make it back; it can be frightened away by a traumatic incident; it can be lured away by an evil spirit. Sometimes, the shaman can lure it back; sometimes, he must negotiate with the evil spirit for the soul; and sometimes, he must do direct battle with the evil spirits for the soul.

- We can reflect on what the conception of health and sickness might say about Hmong values. Health is when all of the souls—the community, we might say—are together harmoniously. Illness is when one is separated, isolated, or alienated.
- Retrieving a lost soul can be demanding, often taking hours. Unlike Korean shamanism, the notion of traveling out to the spirits is central. At one point, a string is tied around the shaman's wrists to lead the soul back.
- Animal sacrifices are also important. The shaman offers gratitude to the animal for its sacrifice, and the animal is usually consumed after the ritual. Many shamans will receive the animal's jawbone, so a shaman with many jawbones has evidence of the numerous rituals he has performed.

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Sharma, *Our Religions*.

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Van Voorst, *Anthology of World Scriptures*.

Walsh, *The World of Shamanism*.

Questions to Consider

1. What do the Shinto festivals in this lecture have in common with Mardi Gras celebrations in New Orleans? What are the similarities and differences between Shinto shrines and Christian churches?
2. Although Shamanism appears to have arisen independently in many geographically remote parts of the world, the various versions have many things in common. What are some of the shared features?
3. What connection do you see between spirituality and healing?

East Asian Buddhism—Zen and Pure Land

Lecture 12

Where did the chubby, smiling Buddha figure come from? That representation—technically a bodhisattva, but one that over time came to be called the laughing Buddha—is a Chinese expression of a new Buddhist ideal. An image like that could not have arisen in India. Now we will learn about the new forms of Buddhism that arose in East Asia, like Zen, and also learn something about the process of religious transformation.

The Laughing Buddha—Chinese Buddhism

- There were deep tensions between the Indian Buddhist worldview and the Chinese worldview in the 1st century C.E. Despite this, after less than 500 years, there were tens of thousands of monasteries and more than 2 million monks and nuns in China.
- The laughing Buddha is a distinctively Chinese image that exemplifies worldly values—joy, the pleasure of a good meal, and sometimes children.
- There are two most popular schools of East Asian Buddhism. One is Chan Buddhism (also known as Son in Korea, or Zen in the West). The other school is Pure Land Buddhism. Both of these schools are forms of Mahayana Buddhism.
- The words “Chan” and “Zen” are simply the Chinese and Japanese ways to transliterate the Sanskrit word “*dhyana*,” which means “meditation.” So the Zen school is the meditation school. Zen was a call back to the original experience of the Buddha.
- Zen is a way of saying, just sit like the Buddha sat and observe your mind and body. The essence of Zen is in direct experience of the mind. You must discover it for yourself.

- Students of Zen study with a master who has been recognized as awakened and qualified to teach the dharma by his or her own master—in other words, received “dharma transmission;” this master in turn received it from his or her master, and so on, all the way back to the Buddha.
- Bodhidharma is credited with bringing this wisdom from India to China, thus beginning the lineage of Zen in East Asia in the 6th century. When Bodhidharma arrived at the Shaolin Buddhist temple, the monks lacked vigor. This, legend says, was the origin of the development of Chinese martial arts (Kung Fu).
- After Bodhidharma gave dharma transmission to his successor, this started a new lineage. The key figure in the Chinese Zen lineage is the sixth patriarch, Hui Neng, whose teachings are said to be given in the most important sutra in Zen, the Platform Sutra.
- Hui Neng was said to have been an illiterate commoner, and this is significant because it shows that a great Zen master need not have any formal education. Hui Neng presents a radical teaching: You are already enlightened. All you need to do is to see into your own nature, to realize your own Buddhahood.
- In addition to changes in religious thought, there were changes in areas such as in approaches to work and food. In India, monks beg



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The laughing Buddha epitomizes the new values Buddhism began to emphasize on as it took hold in China in the 1st century C.E.

in order to sustain themselves. In Chinese monasteries, the monks began growing their own food instead of begging.

- Another important change was that Chinese Buddhists—as well as Korean and Vietnamese Buddhists—put a greater emphasis on vegetarianism than Buddhists in many Southeast Asian Theravada countries.

Japanese Zen—Rinzai and Soto

- The two major schools of Japanese Zen—Rinzai and Soto—were founded by monks who visited China and brought the teachings back.
- In general, the Rinzai school is known as the “hard school” and the Soto school “the soft school.” Rinzai focuses on jolting the mind out of its usual patterns. Rinzai Zen features stories of dramatic awakening, the big moment of *satori* (the Japanese word for enlightenment).
- One of the most well-known and important Rinzai techniques is the *koan*. *Koans* are short, nonrational questions, statements, or dialogues that are given to monks to meditate on. The idea is that all of the monk’s attempts to “solve” the *koan* through reason or usual thought patterns fail. The mind finally gives up rational attempts and experiences a breakthrough.
- You might have heard of such *koans* as “Two hands clap and make a sound. What is the sound of one hand?” *Koans* were assembled into collections, and systems of *koans* were created so that monks could advance to a new one when they had completed their current one.
- Zen emphasizes that the Buddha is not outside of you but rather within. We can now understand the statement, “If you meet the Buddha, kill the Buddha.” If you encounter a Buddha somewhere outside of yourself, then it is not really the Buddha. You have to

break free from this attachment to something external—kill this “Buddha”—so that you will discover the true Buddha within.

- The other major form of Japanese Buddhism, Soto Zen, is all about the practice of sitting. Seated meditation is called *zazen*, and Soto Zen Buddhists emphasize *shikan taza*, “just sitting.”

Western Zen

- Zen has become one of the most popular forms of Buddhism in the West, and there are Zen centers throughout America, Canada, and Europe.
- In American Zen centers, throughout the week, there will be regular meditation sessions. If you decide to visit, wear comfortable clothes, as you will be sitting for a while. Always remember to take your shoes off when entering the meditation hall.
- The entire meditation period is usually passed in silence. Sometimes sitting meditation is supplemented with walking meditation. There are also ritual elements to these sessions, such as chanting and bowing. Many sessions will also include a dharma talk, a Buddhist version of a sermon, where the master talks about the practice and how it applies to our lives.

Zen Buddhism versus Pure Land Buddhism

- The most popular form of Buddhism in Japan is Pure Land Buddhism. It differs in some profound ways from Zen Buddhism. We already know that in Mahayana Buddhism there are conceptions of the Buddha as a more cosmic being. Pure Land Buddhism focuses on one of these Buddhas, known in Japanese as Amida.
- Amida was once a bodhisattva who made 48 vows to help sentient beings. In one, he said that he will create a special Pure Land for his followers and that any who call his name will be reborn there.
- Just like Zen, Pure Land is an example of a form of Buddhism that simplified or narrowed down Buddhism to one practice. In this case,

it is chanting the name of Amida Buddha. In Japanese the chant is, “*Namu amida butsu*,” which means “I pay homage to Amida Buddha,” and has the sense of “I take refuge in/rely upon Amida Buddha.” Pure Land Buddhists can chant this aloud, either alone or in congregations; they can sing it; or they can recite it silently in their minds.

- Pure Land Buddhism emphasized the move from self-power (thinking that we can gain enlightenment through our own efforts) to other-power, relying on Amida’s saving vow. If you perceive some similarities with Protestant Christian theology, you are not alone.

Pure Land Buddhism—Honen and Shinran

- The two most important figures in bringing Pure Land Buddhism to Japan are Honen and his disciple Shinran. One characteristic of Pure Land practitioners is their tendency toward humility. They embrace other-power, Amida, through what they call *shinjin* awareness, entrusting (or faith). The school that developed around Honen’s teaching is known as Jodo Shu, the Pure Land School.
- His disciple Shinran is associated with the Jodo Shinshu, the True Pure Land School, known as Shin Buddhism. Shinran said that, since there is nothing we can do to bring about our own “salvation,” there was no need for celibacy or following monastic discipline. In fact, since there is nothing we can do to bring about our own salvation, why even chant the nembutsu?
- Shinran explained that you chant out of gratitude for what has already been done—the extension of Amida’s saving vow to all beings. When one experiences Amida’s compassion, the desire to call on Amida with the nembutsu will arise spontaneously in one out of gratitude.
- Many people, on learning about Pure Land, think, “So all I have to do is chant? That is incredibly easy!” In fact, some find the act

of fully opening up to other-power, entering into a relationship of complete trust, to be very difficult.

- Many Pure Land believers say that the Pure Land is a state of being, something that can be experienced in the here and now through faith.
- Pure Land Buddhists are congregational. People sit in pews or on chairs rather than cushions on the floor. There will be more Buddha images than one will usually find in a Zen temple or meditation center, especially images of Amida.
- The service prominently features chanting. The priest, usually married, will give a sermon. Relationships within the community and the family are important in Pure Land Buddhism.
- You might have noticed recurring themes in religions of East Asia—syncretism, the practice of combining religions in various ways; and pluralism, the belief that truth can be found in multiple traditions. Because of this, religious identity is understood very differently in East Asia than it is in the West. In both China and Japan, most people can be said to have multiple religious affiliation.

Japanese Religious Affiliation—Life Practices

- Japanese religious affiliation is an interesting topic. The majority of Japanese say that they are not religious. However, if we look at practice, we see high levels of involvement.
- In addition, when polls are taken asking Japanese people what religion they practice or are connected with, the number of checked religions is far greater than the total population of Japan. This means that most people check more than one religion.
- In general, the Japanese tend to practice a particular religion at certain moments in their lives that that religion is best suited to. For example, when a baby is born, a Shinto priest might be called in to conduct a ritual. But when someone dies, a Buddhist priest,

who deals more with the issues of impermanence and death, will be called.

- Some call this approach to religion “contextualism,” and many Chinese and Japanese see religions as dealing with different spheres of life. They are complementary, not conflicting.
- Why is the East Asian approach to religion so different from the Western approach? One perspective is that affiliation in the monotheistic religions is based largely on belief, and many of the beliefs are mutually exclusive. But if religious affiliation is more about practice, then being affiliated with more than one tradition becomes possible. This approach to religion is becoming more common in the West.

Suggested Reading

Beck, *Everyday Zen*.

Beck and Smith, *Nothing Special*.

Bercholz and Chödzin, *Entering the Stream*.

Bloom, *The Essential Shinran*.

Ching, *Chinese Religions*.

De Bary, *The Buddhist Tradition in India, China & Japan*.

De Bary, Bloom, and Lufrano, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*.

Earhart, *Japanese Religion*.

———, *Religion in the Japanese Experience*.

Jochim, *Chinese Religions: A Cultural Perspective*.

Matlins and Magida, *How to Be a Perfect Stranger*.

Mitchell, *Buddhism: Introducing the Buddhist Experience*.

Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ*.

———, *Peace is Every Step*.

Paper and Thompson, *The Chinese Way in Religion*.

Prebish and Tanaka. *The Faces of Buddhism in America*.

Reader, *Religion in Contemporary Japan*.

Sharma, *Our Religions*.

Smith, *The World's Religions*.

Suzuki and Dixon. *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*.

Tanahashi and Schneider. *Essential Zen*.

Thompson, *Chinese Religion: An Introduction*.

Unno, *River of Fire, River of Water*.

Van Vorst, *Anthology of World Scriptures*.

Questions to Consider

1. Discuss some of the differences between the laughing buddhas of China and the meditative buddhas of India. What values does each version highlight?
2. What are the major differences between Zen Buddhism and Pure Land Buddhism? To what extent do you rely on your own inner potential and your practices in your pursuit of spiritual goals, and to what extent do you rely on faith in a power other than yourself?
3. What do you think of the Japanese approach to religious affiliation, whereby a person can maintain connections with more than one religious tradition?

Judaism—God, Torah, and Covenant

Lecture 13

Judaism is the oldest surviving monotheistic religion. The relationship between God and the Jewish people is based on the foundation of the Torah, the teaching and law that God gave to the Jewish people. The stories told in the Torah particularly the stories of Abraham and the Exodus, are the keys to understanding the Jewish identity.

Judaism—Discussion and Stories

- The central role of the rabbis and their ongoing textual study is discussion and debate. There is a continuous engagement with texts.
- There is a strong emphasis on determining the proper way to live in accordance with God’s law and commandments, which is understood as the way to honor the covenant that Jews have made with God.
- The Jews are, among many things, storytellers, and it is rare to engage in any meaningful conversation in the Jewish context without someone, at some point, saying, “There’s a story about this.”
- Another prominent theme in Judaism is layered stories and debates. The Jewish oral law, the Talmud, is structured this way.

The Nature of Jewish Identity

- From one angle, a person who is born to Jewish parents is automatically a Jew.
- “Secular Jews” are those who were born Jewish but follow only some—or none—of the traditional Jewish laws and commandments. In fact, there are more secular Jews in Israel than very observant religious Jews.

- There are Jews who do commit to living life in accordance with the Hebrew Bible. There are also people not born Jewish who convert. So, while there is an ethnic component, there is also a universal component. Anyone can be a Jew.

Demographics

- There are approximately 13.4 million Jews in the world, two-tenths of a percent of the world population. Most Jews live either in Israel or the United States, with approximately 42 percent in each. Most of the rest live in Europe and Canada, although Jews can be found throughout the world.
- The community is generally known in two ways—as Jews, or as the “children or nation of Israel.” The traditional story of the Jewish people comes from the Hebrew Bible.
- Since Jews do not accept the authority of the New Testament, there is no conception of an Old Testament. There is the Bible—the Hebrew Bible, so called because the majority of it is written in Hebrew.
- Most Jewish children learn at least some Hebrew, as Hebrew is the main prayer language. Another term for the Hebrew Bible is Tanakh, an acronym for the three main parts of the Jewish scripture into which its 24 books are divided—Torah (teaching, instruction), Neviim (the Prophets), and Ketuvim (writings).
- Orthodox Jews believe the Torah was handed down by God to Moses on Mount Sinai. Contemporary scholars believe that most of the Hebrew Bible was written between the 10th and 2nd centuries B.C.E., with the Torah reaching its final form during the 5th century B.C.E. The final canonization process occurred in the 1st–2nd century C.E.

The Torah

- The word “Torah” means “instruction” or “teaching,” although many people translate it as “law,” but it consists of much more

than laws and rules. The Torah consists of many genres, including narratives, genealogies, poetry, and commandments. The Torah is understood to contain 613 mitzvot, or commandments.

- When you walk into a synagogue, a Jewish house of prayer, and enter the sanctuary, you will see an elevated platform called a bimah, from which the Torah is read. Behind this platform is an elevated cabinet in which the Torah scroll is kept behind a curtain or closed doors. This is known as the ark, and it evokes the Ark of the Covenant.
- At one point in the service, the congregation stands while the Torah is removed from the ark. It will be “dressed” and “adorned.” During some services, the Torah is carried around the synagogue, and some congregants will touch the scroll and kiss whatever touched the Torah.
- The Sabbath service is largely organized around the Torah reading. Every Sabbath service, a portion of the Torah is read, and throughout the year Jews go through the cycle of reading the entire Torah.
- The word “Torah” refers to the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, which are considered the most important. These are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, often referred to as the Five Books of Moses. Torah is also used to refer to the oral Torah that observant Jews believe to have been given to Moses along with the written Torah, and thereafter passed down in an oral tradition until being written later.



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The word “Torah” may refer to either the oral tradition or written text, depending on context.

- The oral Torah, contained in written form in the Talmud, contains the wisdom of the rabbis used to interpret and apply the Tanakh. In its broadest sense, Torah can be used to refer to the entire written and oral Jewish tradition.
- The Torah has a narrative arc that continues to unfold in later books, namely the Books of the Former Prophets (Joshua through Kings).

Important Themes in the Torah

- One major theme in the Torah is God's activity in history, from a single beginning and moving toward an end time. Another theme is that of the covenant, the agreement between God and his people.
- Genesis, the first book of the Torah, is concerned primarily with three origins—of the universe, of humanity, and of the children of Israel—the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
- To a point, Genesis shifts from the story of humanity to a particular focus on the story of one people: Abraham and his descendants.

Abraham and His Sons

- Abraham is considered the patriarch of all three monotheistic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Abraham is called by God to travel to the Land of Canaan. Abraham gives God his obedience, and God promises to make a great nation of Abraham, give his descendants land, bless those who bless him, and curse those who curse him.
- The sign of the covenant between God and Abraham and his descendants is male circumcision, which is practiced by all observant Jews, as well as Muslims.
- Abraham is promised by God that he will be the father of many nations, including one through his son with Sarah, Isaac (the Jews), and one through his son with Hagar, Ishmael (the Arabs).

- In Genesis, chapter 22, God tests Abraham by demanding that he sacrifice his beloved son Isaac. Abraham is willing and is just about to sacrifice Isaac when an angel of God stops him and has Abraham substitute a ram for Isaac. One understanding of this story is the unacceptability of human sacrifice and the requirement that animals be substituted.
- The next important figure is the third great patriarch of the Jewish tradition, Jacob, son of Isaac and Rebecca. In one story, Jacob wrestles all night with a stranger who turns out to be an angel of God—or perhaps God himself. Jacob asks for a blessing and is renamed Israel. This is the origin of the name of the nation, which can mean “to struggle/wrestle with God.”
- Jacob has two wives (Leah and Rachel) and 12 sons, who become the ancestors of the 12 tribes of Israel.
- The next story arc brings us to the book of Exodus. Jacob, his wives, and children leave the land of Canaan during famine and go to Egypt. The Pharaoh believes that the Israelites have become too numerous, turns them into slaves, and ultimately orders all male babies born to Israelite women killed. One of these babies survives to become the main protagonist for the rest of the Torah: Moses.

Moses and the Exodus

- The infant Moses is sent floating down the Nile; he is found and raised by the Pharaoh’s daughter, but his own mother was employed as his nurse. Thus, Moses grew up with knowledge of kinship to the Israelites.
- As an adult, while Moses tended his flocks, God spoke to Moses from a burning bush and chose him to be a prophet, telling him to liberate the Israelite people.
- During this encounter, Moses asked who was speaking to him. God responded by saying something like, “I will be who I will be” or “I am who I am.” (God is identified with the verb “to be.”)

- Moses repeatedly demanded that his people be freed, but each time the Pharaoh consented and then refused. To convince Pharaoh to relent, God sent 10 plagues, which include locusts, flies, and darkness, but none made the Pharaoh change his mind.
- The tenth plague visits on the Egyptians the same horror that Pharaoh had used against the Israelites: the killing of children (in this case, the killing of the firstborn). The Israelite people mark their doors with lamb's blood so that the angel of death would pass over their homes, which is the origin of the term "Passover" (Pesach in Hebrew).
- Finally, the Israelites are freed, but even then the Pharaoh changes his mind and sends his army after them. This leads to Moses holding his staff toward the sea, at which point the waters divide so the Israelites can cross. When the Egyptian army pursues them, Moses again holds up his staff, and the waters come down upon them, drowning them all.
- This begins the account of the 40-year desert wandering of the Israelites on their way to the Promised Land, the Land of Canaan. The story of the liberation of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt is retold every year during the Passover Seder.
- A central moment in the history of the Jewish people comes when God gives Moses the tablets with the 10 Commandments on them. The first four are—to have no other gods but the God of Israel, to not make any image of God, to not make false oaths in God's name, and to keep the Sabbath. The final six are to honor your father and mother and to not murder, commit adultery, steal, bear false witness, or covet another's wife, house, or possessions.
- The Jewish people wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. The notion of wandering before entering the promised land has become an important Jewish theme. Ultimately, the Israelites did reach, and conquer, the Land of Canaan, where they established their kingdom.

- Although Moses saw the Promised Land from a mountaintop, he did not live to enter it. This has become an inspiration to others, including Martin Luther King Jr.
- The Torah ends with the death of Moses. More than any other human being, Moses is responsible for the creation of the Jewish people. Many Jews call Moses “Moshe Rabbenu,” (our rabbi) and “father of all the prophets.”

Suggested Reading

Atwood, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*.

Cahill, *The Gifts of the Jews*.

Coogan, Brettler, Newsom, and Perkins, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*.

Dorff and Newman, *Contemporary Jewish Theology: A Reader*.

Fishbane, *Judaism: Revelation and Traditions*.

Holtz, *Back to the Sources*.

Jewish Publication Society, *Tanakh*.

Matlins and Magida, *How to Be a Perfect Stranger*.

Scheindlin, *A Short History of the Jewish People*.

Sharma, *Our Religions*.

Smith, *The World's Religions*.

Van Vorst, *Anthology of World Scriptures*.

Questions to Consider

1. What are the Torah and the Talmud, and what is the relation between them?
2. What are some of the ways that the history of the Jewish people as narrated in the Hebrew Bible has shaped what Judaism is today? In what ways does the Jewish concept of time as linear (as opposed to Asian

conceptions of cosmic time as cyclical) shape the Jewish worldview (and that of Christianity and Islam as well)?

- 3.** Why are Abraham and Moses considered by many to be the two most important people in the Jewish tradition?

Varieties of Jewish Thought and Practice

Lecture 14

There are two sacred centers for Jews, illustrating the two different forms that the religion has taken since the Israelites reached the Promised Land, according to tradition, over 3,000 years ago: Jerusalem, and particularly its temple, which was destroyed by Roman conquerors in the 1st century C.E.; and the second is the sacred text of the Torah itself, the intellectual and metaphysical center of Jewish identity.

The Two Sacred Centers

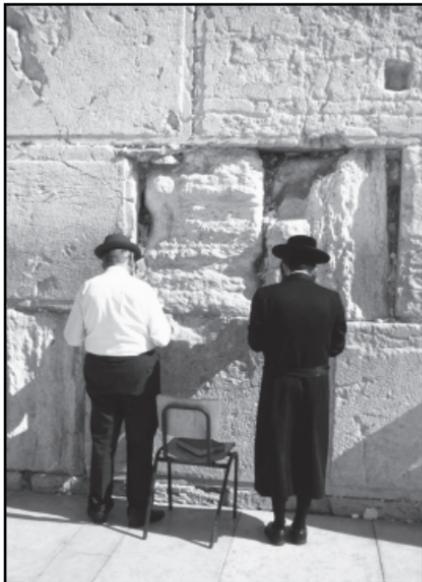
- The first sacred center of Judaism is Jerusalem, established by Israel's greatest king, David. According to tradition, the Kingdom of Israel existed as a united monarchy from around 1020 B.C.E. to 930 B.C.E., during which it was ruled primarily by three kings—Saul, David and Solomon.
- Under King Solomon the Great Temple was built in Jerusalem as a home for the Ark of the Covenant. After Solomon's death, the northern tribes rebelled and establish a Kingdom of Israel in the north, while the southern Kingdom of Judah remained loyal to David's line.
- The northern Kingdom of Israel was conquered by Assyria in 722 B.C.E., and most of the Israelites were exiled and dispersed, becoming known as the 10 lost tribes of Israel. The Kingdom of Judah remained independent until it was conquered by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.E., leading to the destruction of the Temple.
- After exile in Babylon for 50 years, some Jews returned to their holy land, permitted to do so by King Cyrus of Persia, who had conquered the Babylonians. Although most Jews did not return to Jerusalem, the rebuilt temple, called the Second Temple, became a sacred center and important symbol to Jews wherever they lived.

- The religion of the Second Temple period featured a priestly class and animal sacrifices to God, different from the religion of the rabbis and Torah that characterizes Judaism today.
- In the 4th century B.C.E., the empire of Alexander the Great brought Greek influences to the Middle East, and many Jews began to adopt Greek ways. Tensions between traditional and Hellenized (Greek-influenced) Jews increased.
- This led to a rebellion, headed by the Maccabee family, against later Syrian invaders. This war is commemorated every year through the celebration of Chanukah. The Maccabee kingdom lasted for less than a century until its conquest by Rome. It was the last Jewish nation until the establishment of the state of Israel nearly 2,000 years later.
- The religion of the Jewish people during the Second Temple period centered on the holy site of the Temple. Priests performed sacrifices of animals, grains, and holy oil.
- In addition, there were groups that separated themselves from society, the Essenes. Some Essenes retreated to a compound near the Dead Sea called Qumran, where their library of texts, now known as the Dead Sea Scrolls, was discovered in 1947.
- At the same time, another form of Judaism began to emerge. Jewish religious life began to flourish in places outside of the Temple, namely synagogues. The organization of the Hebrew Bible was finalized, and the tradition of reading Torah portions probably began.
- Another group of Jews that was important toward the end of this period is the Zealots, who advocated armed resistance to Roman rule. This all came to a head in the Great Jewish Revolt which began in the year 66 C.E., which culminated in the slaughter of Jewish rebels and the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in the year 70.

- The only part of the Temple that survived was a set of foundation stones used in a retaining wall. Known as the Western Wall, this is the holiest pilgrimage site to Jews in the world today (along with the Temple Mount itself). Many Jews who come to the wall weep in mourning over the destruction of the Temple, which has given this site the name the Wailing Wall.

Judaism after the Temple

- From that point until the 20th century, the majority of the world's Jews lived in the Diaspora, a condition of scattering and dispersion around the world. During the two millennia that the Jews did not live in their holy land, and without their Temple, what held the community together?
- Although the Jews of the Diaspora still kept Jerusalem in their hearts and minds, the other center of Jewish life was the text—the Torah—which became the foundation for their traditions, laws, and rituals.
- After the destruction of the Temple, the authority of the priests and the practice of animal sacrifices were replaced by the authority of rabbis and the practices of prayer, Torah reading and study, and ethical behavior.



Jerusalem's Wailing Wall is all that remains of the Second Temple, destroyed by the Romans in 70 C.E.

- The rabbis engaged in a process of interpretation called midrash, which involves probing the deep meaning of biblical texts, filling in the gaps of stories in the Bible, and looking at subtexts and implications of passages. There are two areas of midrash: Halakah (covering the areas of law and custom) and Aggadah (narratives, history, folklore, and moral and practical advice).
- These discourses were eventually written down and brought together in the Mishnah around 200 C.E. Later rabbis' commentaries were organized and combined with the Mishnah to make the Talmud.
- The Talmud is essential for understanding the Torah and applying it to one's life. It presents an ongoing conversation and debate across space and time among rabbis in its pages, and the process continues among rabbis today.

Historical Treatment of Jews

- From the time of the fall of the Second Temple, Jews have lived in almost every part of the world, but they have typically managed to avoid being assimilated into the dominant cultures where they lived.
- The treatment of Jews has varied dramatically. In some cases, Jews were able to flourish, such as in Poland at times in the Middle Ages.
- Jews of Central and Eastern Europe are known as Ashkenazi Jews. Between the 11th and 19th centuries, Ashkenazi Jews migrated to areas further east, including Hungary, Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, and Russia. The Ashkenazi Jews developed the language of Yiddish, which was a hybrid of German and Hebrew, written with the Hebrew alphabet.
- Jews flourished in other areas as well during certain historical periods, with one notable example being Islamic Spain. Jews who lived in Spain and Portugal, and their descendants, are known as Sephardi Jews. In addition to different points of origins,

Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews differ in matters of ritual, food, and pronunciation of Hebrew.

- An influential Jewish thinker during the Middle Ages was Moses ben-Maimon, known by many Jews as Rambam. Born in Cordoba, Spain, in 1135, Rambam died in Egypt in 1204. His 14-volume *Mishneh Torah*, a codification of Jewish law and ethics, is still studied in yeshivas today.
- The mystical, esoteric expression of Judaism is generally referred to as Kabbalah, which found systematic expression first in the 11th–13th centuries and developed different forms later. The most important mystical text is *The Zohar*.
- A pattern that repeats itself countless times is one where Jews were all too often violently attacked. Even in places where they once thrived, like Poland and Spain, Jews eventually fell victim to changing currents. For example, in Poland, ruthless campaigns were conducted against Jews in the 15th century. In late 15th-century Spain, after Christian rulers replaced Muslims, Jews were forcibly expelled.
- Anti-Semitism was pervasive throughout Europe in the Middle Ages and into the modern period, and Jews were exiled from many countries. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries in Russia, many Jewish communities were victims of violent mob attacks known as pogroms, which aimed to assault and kill Jews and to destroy their businesses and synagogues.

The Holocaust and Zionism

- During World War II, the Holocaust resulted in the deaths of over half of the entire Jewish population of Europe, about 6 million people (over a third of all Jews in the world). In Hebrew, this is known as the Shoah, or “catastrophe.” Yom HaShoah is a day to commemorate the Jews and others who died in the Holocaust.

- Jewish theologians had to struggle with the Holocaust. Emil Fackenheim argued: “Jews are forbidden to hand Hitler posthumous victories. They are commanded to survive as Jews, lest the Jewish people perish. They are commanded to remember the victims of Auschwitz, lest their memory perish. ... They are forbidden to despair of the God of Israel, lest Judaism perish.”
- The intensity of the Jewish commitment to “never forget” contributed strongly to the Zionist movement and the creation of the modern nation of Israel. In the late 19th century, Zionism grew into an organized political movement led by Theodor Herzl, an Austrian journalist.
- As an important part of this process, the language of Hebrew was revived in the 19th and 20th centuries as a language to be shared by returning Jews, who spoke a wide variety of languages in the Diaspora. This is the only known example from history of a language with no native speakers being consciously revived to become the native language of millions.
- Many Zionists were secular Jews, motivated not by any particular theological commitments but by the belief that Jews would never be fully secure until they had their own nation

Modern Jewish Groups

- Most Jews—other than completely secular Jews, who consider their Jewishness purely ethnic—fall into one of three groups: Orthodox, Conservative, or Reform.
- Orthodoxy is the form of Judaism that emphasizes closely following the revealed law contained in the Torah and Talmud as interpreted by the rabbis. One form of Orthodox Judaism is Chasidism, which was developed in 18th-century Eastern Europe.
- The movement was founded by Rabbi Israel ben-Eliezer, born in 1698 and known as the Master of the Good Name, Baal Shem Tov. This was the beginning of the tradition of the Tzaddik, or Rebbe,

in Chasidism, a charismatic figure qualified to transmit a form of transformative mystical knowledge.

- Chasidic Jews find holiness in day-to-day life and highlight the sacredness of the ordinary. Hasidic men usually wear dark clothing, such as a long jacket and black hat, and often have long, uncut sideburns and beards.
- The modern Orthodox seek to combine observance of the law with a fuller integration into the modern world.
- Reform Judaism grew out of this 18th-century Enlightenment movement. It said that the laws of the Torah would be seen as guidelines that could be adjusted to modernity, not as binding obligations.
- One of the most significant transformations came in the role of women, as Reform Judaism has had women serving as rabbis since 1972. Reform Judaism has also embraced gays and lesbians, and gay rabbis have been ordained.
- Most Reform Jews do not keep kosher, do not strictly observe the Sabbath, and do not attend synagogue weekly. However, many Reform Jews do attend synagogue periodically, especially during the High Holy Days, and still practice important rituals and traditions.
- Conservative Jews affirm the authority of Jewish law but argue that its interpretation and application have always changed throughout history.

Suggested Reading

Atwood, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*.

Cahill, *The Gifts of the Jews*.

Dorff and Newman, *Contemporary Jewish Theology: A Reader*.

Fishbane, *Judaism: Revelation and Traditions*.

Matlins and Magida, *How to Be a Perfect Stranger*.

Scheindlin, *A Short History of the Jewish People*.

Sharma, *Our Religions*.

Smith, *The World's Religions*.

Van Voorst, *Anthology of World Scriptures*.

Questions to Consider

1. In what ways have exile, Diaspora, pogroms, and the Holocaust shaped modern Judaism?
2. In what sense are Jerusalem and the Torah the two sacred centers of Judaism?
3. What are the main differences among Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox Judaism?

Living a Jewish Life

Lecture 15

During rituals and holidays, Jews tell stories—often communicating through actions and objects, such as through the arrangement of items on a plate or the construction of a booth. The spinning of a top and the lighting of candles also provide meaning. Some of these involve work, but the heart of the Jewish religious life is a day in which no work is done—the Sabbath.

The Sabbath

- The week for observant Jews is woven around Shabbat, or the Sabbath. It begins at sundown on Friday night and ends at sundown Saturday night.
- The Sabbath is celebrated at home with a special dinner on Friday night. Prayers are recited over the bread and the wine, and a special meal is eaten.
- Sabbath services are held in the synagogue on Friday evening, Saturday morning, and Saturday afternoon. Jewish Sabbath services generally feature reading and chanting from the Torah and the Prophets, congregational and private prayer, singing, and a sermon from the rabbi.
- The Sabbath day is for reflecting on the Torah, praying, and spending time with family and friends.
- Jews who observe the Sabbath avoid work related to their professions and do not use modern conveniences like electricity, ovens, the telephone, and traveling by any method other than walking; there are exceptions made for emergencies.

- Jewish law guides all daily activities, providing boundaries on what is acceptable to eat, wear, and say. Throughout the day, one should offer prayers of gratitude for every blessing.
- Purity was and remains a central concern. Among the Orthodox especially, the mikvah, a ritual bath used for purification, is of great importance.

Prayer Rituals

- As part of the prayer rituals, some Jews keep their heads covered with a kippa or cap (called a yarmulke in Yiddish). Women will sometimes cover with a headscarf, and many Orthodox women will wear a wig.
- Observant traditional Jews pray three times daily, wearing a tallit, or prayer shawl. For weekday morning prayers, men (and some women) put on tfillin (“phylacteries”) consisting of two small leather boxes containing verses from the Bible, including the Shema. One box is tied on the forehead and the other on the upper left arm close to the heart.
- Jews will attach a mezuzah, a piece of parchment on which is written the Shema, over their doorframe, contained in a decorative case. Some Jews hang a mezuzah in front of every room of the house (except the bathroom), while others place it only in front of the main entrance.
- Among Jewish symbols is the Star of David. The six pointed star composed of two triangles is said to represent the tribes of Judah and Benjamin.

Allowable and Prohibited Foods

- The issue of kosher food will be important if you dine with Jewish friends who keep kosher. The laws of kashrut, or kosher laws, fall into three general areas.

- The Torah defines certain animals as unclean and forbidden to eat. Cows and sheep are permissible, but rabbits and all pig products are not. Poultry is permitted, and fish with gills and fins are permitted, but not shellfish.
- If the animal is permitted for food, Jewish kosher slaughter practices ensure that blood is separated from meat. Practices such as soaking and salting the meat are used for this purpose.
- Kosher laws do not allow mixing meat and dairy, and there is a separation of dishes and utensils used for meat and those used for dairy. All foods outside the category of meat or dairy are considered *parve*, or neutral, and can be eaten with either meat or dairy.
- Some Jews are beginning to argue that the best way to honor the intent of kosher laws, which promote care and compassion for animals, is to eat a vegetarian diet.

Holidays and Festivals

- Jewish High Holy Days begin with the Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashanah, in September or October. During Rosh Hashanah and throughout the High Holy Days that culminate in Yom Kippur, Jews reflect on their deeds of the previous year, stand before God's judgment, and commit themselves to righteous living.
- At the Rosh Hashanah service, a shofar (ram's horn trumpet) is blown to usher in the holidays. It is said that the shofar wakes up those who are sleeping and reminds people that they stand before God.
- Ten days after Rosh Hashanah comes the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish year. The main purpose of this day is to atone for one's transgressions. Jews are expected to engage in introspection, ask for forgiveness from God, and ask for forgiveness from those they may have wronged.

- There are many other holidays in the Jewish year. The four most popular and commonly observed are Passover, Sukkot, Chanukah, and Purim, the latter two which commemorate triumphant events in Jewish history. An all purpose greeting is “Chag Sameach,” which basically means “Happy Holiday.”
- One of the most widely celebrated holidays is Passover, or Pesach. The focus is the retelling of the story of the liberation of Israelite slaves from the land of Egypt. The holiday is celebrated for seven or eight days, with the primary celebratory meals occurring on the first two nights.
- The heart of the Passover celebration is the Seder, a meal at which the Exodus story is told and sung, and symbolic foods are consumed. Passover Seders are family get-togethers, and everyone at the table gets a Passover Haggadah, which gives everyone the text from which to read.
- On the center of the table is a Seder plate that contains symbolic foods. The most well-known is matzoh, unleavened bread, which is eaten throughout the holiday. According to tradition, when the Israelites were fleeing the Egyptians, they did not have time to let their bread rise but ate it flat. For that reason, throughout Passover Jews do not eat any bread, cookies, pasta, or other leavened items.
- There are a number of other symbolic items on the Seder plate, including bitter herbs (maror), as well as charoset, a mixture of nuts and fruit. There is also a shank bone, which represents the sacrificial lamb.
- Sukkot is a week-long fall harvest festival, occurring in late September or October, commemorating the journey of the Israelites in the desert after escaping from Egypt. The main theme of the holiday is the need for Jews to maintain their commitment to their tradition.

- Chanukah is celebrated for eight days, and its main symbol is an eight-branched candelabrum called a menorah (or Chanukiya) with a ninth branch usually elevated above the other eight to hold the candle that will light the others. Jewish families place the Chanukiya in a window so that everyone can share in the celebration.
- Because of the importance of oil to this holiday, foods cooked and fried in oil (such as filled donuts) are traditionally eaten on Chanukah. One popular Chanukah food is the potato pancake, known as a latke.
- A popular Chanukah game involves playing with a top, called a dreidel, which has a Hebrew letter on each side. Chanukah has become the major gift-giving holiday among American Jews; in some families, gifts are given on each of the eight nights.
- Purim, the Festival of Lots, celebrates the deliverance of the Jews from a plot to destroy them. This is a joyous, celebratory holiday with a sense of drama. The foods associated with Purim include cookies called hamantaschen shaped like triangles and filled with sweet paste.

The Major Life Events

- Along with the rhythms of the week and the year, the Jews follow a sacred timeline for a human life. There are four main events marked by rites of passage: birth, coming of age, marriage, and death.
- The ritual associated with birth is the circumcision of a male baby on the eighth day of its life, an event called a bris. At this ritual, a Hebrew name is chosen, and most Jews throughout the world have a Hebrew name in addition to their given names. A ceremony called a simchat bat (“celebration of the daughter”), in which a baby girl receives her Hebrew name, is celebrated among some Jewish communities.

- The ceremony in which a Jewish child takes on responsibility for his or her actions, becoming a “son or daughter of the commandments,” is the Bar or Bat Mitzvah. A Bar or Bat Mitzvah usually occurs when the child is 13 years old but



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A Jewish child’s Bar or Bat Mitzvah is a religious rite of passage that marks the transition from childhood to adulthood.

can occur any time after that. The essence of the ceremony is that the child leads the service in the synagogue and chants a Torah and Haftarah portion in Hebrew.

- The next important life-cycle event is marriage. When a couple plans to marry, they receive a ketubah, which is a wedding contract specifying rights and obligations.
- Jewish marriage occurs under a canopy, called a chuppah, which symbolizes the new home being created by the couple. The bride often walks around the groom seven times when she enters the chuppah.
- The second distinctive element of the Jewish marriage ceremony is the seven blessings, which are said by the rabbi or invited guests. These celebrate God’s creation of the universe, humanity, the fruit of the vine, and so on.
- At the end of the ceremony, the groom stomps on a glass and breaks it. The guests all shout, “mazel tov” (“good luck”).

Jewish Death Rituals

- On the news of the death of a loved one, it is customary to tear or cut an article of clothing, symbolizing the need to accept the permanent separation. The body of the deceased is washed and dressed, and burial societies specialize in the preparation of the corpse.
- In the Jewish tradition, the body is to be buried as quickly as possible after death. Traditional Jews do not practice embalming and therefore do not have open caskets at funerals.
- One notable Jewish practice is that mourners come to the graveside to pour shovelfuls of dirt over the casket. This practice, seen as a last act of care, is said to provide a sense of closure, which can help with the mourning process.
- Following the death, there is a weeklong mourning period called “sitting shiva” (the Jewish word for seven). Members of the immediate family receive visitors in their home. Friends and members of the community visit, bring food, and sit and talk. Traditionally, visitors will wait for the mourners to talk before talking. Mourners traditionally do not shower or bathe, shave, wear jewelry or leather shoes. Some mourners sit on low stools or the floor, which symbolizes their emotional state.

Suggested Reading

Atwood, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*.

Cahill, *The Gifts of the Jews*.

Dorff and Newman, *Contemporary Jewish Theology*.

Fishbane, *Judaism: Revelation and Traditions*.

Matlins and Magida, *How to Be a Perfect Stranger*.

Scheidlin, *A Short History of the Jewish People*.

Sharma, *Our Religions*.

Smith, *The World's Religions*.

Van Voorst, *Anthology of World Scriptures*.

Questions to Consider

1. What does the word Passover refer to, and what do some of the foods of the Seder meal symbolize?
2. In our work-driven society, what would you think of putting all work aside for a whole day every week for rest, worship, and family?
3. In what ways do your religious or ethical commitments influence what you will or will not eat?

The Life and Commemoration of Jesus

Lecture 16

Christianity is the largest, most widespread religion in the world. The element uniting the tradition is the figure of Jesus of Nazareth, born approximately 2,000 years ago as Yeshua, a Galilean Jew. How Jesus became Christ the Lord is one of the greatest stories ever told. So our study must begin with the life of Jesus.

The New Testament

- Most of what we know about Jesus comes from the biblical New Testament. Christianity began as a form of Judaism.
- During the period in which Jesus lived, many Jews looked for the imminent coming of the Messiah prophesied in the Hebrew Bible. It was into this world that Jesus was born, and as he taught, he began to attract followers. Jesus lived his entire life as a Jew, and all of his earliest followers were Jews.
- The scripture of the early followers of Jesus was the Hebrew Bible, the scripture of the Jewish people. This remains a part of scripture for Christians, who call it the Old Testament. Christian Bibles, therefore, contain the Hebrew Bible, often additional noncanonical Jewish texts called the Apocrypha, and the 27 books of the New Testament.
- The New Testament consists of four types of books—four Gospels containing narratives of the life of Jesus; a narrative called Acts of the Apostles; letters, called Epistles; and the book of Revelation.
- Most of our knowledge about the life and death of Jesus comes in particular from what are called the three synoptic Gospels, since they share so much material about the story of Jesus: Mark, Matthew, and Luke. The fourth Gospel, John, is quite different in

content and style and more focused on theological reflections and less on narrative than the others.

The Gospels

- The gospels were written between the years 50 and 110 C.E., so none were written down during Jesus's life. After a long period of debate, the New Testament achieved its current form around the 4th century.
- The word "gospel" means "good news." The gospels deliver a message about hope and salvation, focusing on certain periods and events in the life of Jesus to deliver the message most powerfully.
- The events of Jesus's life that are the focus of the Gospel narratives are his birth, his baptism, his ministry (what he taught and preached), his miracles and healing work, and especially the final week of his life, which culminates in an account of his crucifixion and resurrection.

The Birth of Jesus

- When Mary was engaged to Joseph, the angel Gabriel told her that she would give birth by power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, Mary is understood to be a virgin when she gives birth to Jesus. When Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem, there was no room for them at the inn, and Jesus, whose name means "God saves," was born in a stable.
- The two periods of the year most sacred to Christians center on Jesus's birth and his death and resurrection. The series of holidays surrounding his birth include Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany.
- Advent culminates in Christmas itself, celebrated on December 25. The actual date of Jesus's birth is unknown. It is likely that this date, occurring near the Winter Solstice, was chosen to fold the pagan solstice ritual into the Christian celebration.

Jesus's Adult Life

- John the Baptist was a prophet performing baptisms to cleanse people of sin and prepare them for the coming kingdom of God. At age 30, Jesus was baptized by John. John recognized that Jesus was someone very special, and told Jesus, “I should be baptized by you.”
- Baptism is the ritual by which one is brought into a relationship with Christ and the church. A major division within Christianity is whether baptism should take place at birth or whether it should be offered only to those old enough to make a conscious commitment.
- Jesus's teaching demonstrates the inversion of traditional values. In a society that emphasized purity, Jesus touched lepers and associated with outcasts; in a strongly patriarchal society, Jesus welcomed women as disciples.
- Jesus stood with the poor, the weak, and the sick and called on the wealthy and powerful to repent and reform. Jesus's power was shown through selfless service, from washing disciples' feet and healing the sick to the ultimate sacrifice on the cross.
- Jesus taught a radical ethics, one that called on people to turn away from revenge and retributive justice to an ethic of love and forgiveness. He challenged his followers to “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,” to suffer a blow rather than return it.
- Jesus's miracles reflected this spirit as well. While some of them were demonstrations of his power over the natural world, such as walking on water, many miracles were to help others—healing the sick (even raising the dead), casting out demons, and turning a few loaves of bread and pieces of fish into an abundant meal for multitudes.

The Crucifixion and Afterward

- Given the concerns that authorities had about Jesus, it was dangerous for him to go to Jerusalem. Nevertheless, on Passover, a Jewish pilgrimage festival, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey as a crowd praised and blessed him.
- In the Passion narrative, an account of his final days and death, Jesus seemed to know that his final days lay ahead. In fact, the plan to betray him had already been set in motion, as one of his disciples, Judas, had sold information that would lead to Jesus's arrest by the Romans.
- Jesus has one final meal with his 12 apostles. This is known as the Last Supper, which is understood to have been a Passover Seder. This meal becomes the origin for the sacrament of Holy Communion. At the Last Supper, a popular subject for Christian art for centuries (most famously portrayed in Leonardo da Vinci's 1498 painting), Jesus predicts that one of his apostles will betray him.
- Virtually all Christians observe the Eucharist, or Holy Communion, a ritual meal. For Catholics, the bread and wine is, in its essence, Christ's body and blood. A priest brings this about through consecration of the bread and wine.



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The Crucifixion of Christ, commemorated by Christians on Good Friday, is the origin of the main Christian symbol, the cross.

- When congregants receive the bread and wine, they are both experiencing communion with Christ and remembering the event of the Last Supper. This ritual is a central feature of Catholic worship services, called masses.
- After his betrayal by Judas, Jesus undergoes trials by both the Jewish authorities, where he is charged with blasphemy, and then by Roman governor Pontius Pilate. Pilate, in response to the demands of a crowd, gives Jesus over to Roman soldiers, who beat him and bring him to the hill of Golgotha to be crucified.
- The event of Jesus’s crucifixion is commemorated in the Christian observance of Good Friday, or Holy Friday, the Friday before Easter Sunday. During Lent, the period before Easter Sunday, Christians in some denominations, especially Catholic, stage a Passion play, a dramatic reenactment of the passion of Jesus Christ (the trial, suffering, crucifixion, and death; “Passion” here is connected with the root of “passive,” “to suffer”).
- The crucifixion provides the most powerful symbol of Christianity—the cross. It evokes Jesus’s selfless sacrifice and that reminds Christians that the instrument of death—in fact death itself—along with sin, have been conquered through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.
- After Jesus’s death, his body was placed in a sealed and guarded tomb. Many of the disciples were grief-stricken, frightened, and disheartened.
- Women followers of Jesus, including Mary Magdalene, went to the tomb to prepare his body for burial rituals, but they found the tomb was empty. They were visited by angels who told them Jesus rose from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus is celebrated on Easter Sunday, the Sunday following Good Friday.
- After this, Jesus makes a number of appearances to disciples to remove doubt.

Major Christian Observances

- The second major period of observance, one associated with the end of Jesus's life, begins with Lent, a period of 40 days (from Ash Wednesday to Easter) where Christians repent and renounce as a form of fasting to share in Christ's sacrifice. The period of 40 days evokes that 40 days that Jesus spent fasting in the desert, where he overcame the temptations by Satan.
- The last week of Lent, which culminates in Easter Sunday, is called Holy Week. The Thursday before Easter is known as Maundy Thursday. On the Friday before Easter Sunday, Christians observe Good Friday (or Holy Friday). Catholics see this as a fast day, with only one full meal and abstention from meat.
- Easter celebrates the resurrection of Christ and is thus the most theologically significant holiday in Christianity. This is the holiday in which the promise of triumph over death and the attaining of eternal life through the sacrifice of Christ are celebrated.
- The two most celebrated Christian holidays—Christmas and Easter—are both syncretic, combining pre-Christian pagan elements (such as trees, mistletoe, bunnies, and eggs).
- The Christmas tree, an evergreen that was originally a pagan nature symbol, can be seen as representing the eternal life promised by Jesus. Easter, which occurs in the spring, brings in pagan celebrations of the vernal equinox, which highlights the return of life after the cold of winter.

The Meaning of Jesus

- The story of Jesus has served as an inspiration and an example to Christians for the last 2,000 years. At the same time, there is a deep mystery in the story, and it raises a question with which Christians have grappled ever since: Who—and what—was Jesus?
- To most Christians, Jesus is a savior. Jesus's death and resurrection ushered in a kingdom of God on Earth in which people can

participate now. At the same time, many Christians believe, Jesus will usher in Judgment Day and the final Kingdom of God at his Second Coming.

- Jesus’s identity is represented in a symbol, the fish. One explanation comes from the Greek word for fish, *ichthys*. This word was seen as an acrostic for the phrase—*Iesous Christos Theou yios soter*, which means, “Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior.”
- In art Jesus is sometimes portrayed as a powerful king. Other images show Jesus as the suffering servant, bleeding on the cross. Jesus is also portrayed as an infant, inviting Christians to see God even in the small and vulnerable. Finally, Jesus is seen as a human embodiment of divine qualities.
- Most Christians have found profound meaning in both his life and death, his teachings, and his sacrifice. The attempt to live a life defined by both of these has been the guiding Christian ideal for two millennia.

Suggested Reading

Atwood, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*.

Borg, *Jesus, a New Vision*.

Coogan, Brettler, Newsom, and Perkins, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*.

Ehrman, *A Brief Introduction to the New Testament*.

Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ*.

Gomes, *The Good Book*.

Holt, *Thirsty for God*.

Marty, *The Christian World*.

Matlins and Magida, *How to Be a Perfect Stranger*.

McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*.

———, *The Christian Theology Reader*.

Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*.

Pagels, *Beyond Belief*.

———, *The Gnostic Gospels*.

Sharma, *Our Religions*.

Smith, *The World's Religions*.

Van Voorst, *Anthology of World Scriptures*.

Questions to Consider

1. Reflect on the variety of ways that Jesus is represented—as infant, miracle worker, suffering servant, king, et cetera. What does this range of images convey about Jesus? What is the relationship between his life and ministry on the one hand and his death and resurrection on the other?
2. What do you make of pagan elements, such as Easter eggs and the Christmas tree, being incorporated into a Christian holiday?

Catholic and Orthodox Christianity

Lecture 17

During the 1st century after Jesus's death, Christianity was a small, persecuted religion. Today, it is the largest religion in the world. Given that so many religions come and go, how has Christianity been able to survive, spread, and ultimately flourish? In this lecture, we will trace the development of Christianity and the variety of its forms today—from Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Lutheran, to Baptist, Quaker, and Mormon.

The Apostles and Paul

- After Jesus's death, the apostles began to spread the “good news” about salvation through Christ, but the apostle Paul is most responsible for the understanding of Jesus that would become the foundation of most forms of Christian theology.
- Paul's letters sent to Christian communities provided guidance, explained doctrine, and encouraged fellow believers. They also explained the significance of Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection. For this reason, Paul, more than Jesus, can be seen as the founder of the Christian religion.
- A prominent view presented by Paul is a form of atonement theory, which is based on the concept that we are born in “original sin,” inheriting our sinful nature from our fallen ancestors, Adam and Eve. We can only be saved by God's grace through Jesus. To make our salvation possible, Jesus took our sins on himself.

The Nicene Council and Creed

- For the first three centuries after Jesus's death, Christianity spread rapidly, but Christians faced persecution and even death. However, the Roman Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity in the early 4th century, ultimately leading to Christianity as the empire's religion.

- Constantine next decided to achieve consensus on issues. A council of bishops convened in Nicaea (in modern-day Turkey) in 325. The nature of Jesus was a central issue. One of the bishops, Arius, believed that Jesus, as son, was created by God and was inferior to God the Father. This view was condemned as heresy at the council.
- Ultimately, what came out of the council was the foundation of most Christian theology, the Nicene Creed. It proclaims belief in God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit—the Holy Trinity.
- Christians are monotheists who proclaim the oneness of God, and at the same time understand God as being “three-in-one.” Ultimately anything that you can say about God the Father (that God is omnipresent, eternal, loving), can also be said of Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

Divisions in Catholicism

- In 330, Constantine had established a new eastern capital for his empire, calling it Constantinople. After the sack of Rome in 410, Constantinople became a new center of Christianity. The Eastern and Western parts of the empire would grow further apart and would ultimately yield two forms of Christianity—Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox.
- A number of factors contributed to the division. Christians in the East did not recognize the supreme authority of the bishop of Rome, the pope. There was also a division over interpretations of the Trinity and debates over the nature of original sin. They were also divided over language and ritual. Other issues dealt with the priesthood, in particular whether priests must be celibate.
- The differences came to a head in 1054 when the authorities from each church excommunicated each other, a schism that divides Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches to this day.

The Roman Catholic Church

- The Roman Catholic Church has more members than any other church—over 1.1 billion people. The majority of Catholics live in Europe and the Americas, and there has been high growth in Asia and Africa. At 68 million, Roman Catholicism is the largest denomination in the United States.
- The Catholic Church is a unified, hierarchical structure, led by the pope; under the pope are bishops. Bishops have authority over areas known as dioceses, which are further divided into parishes, the individual church communities under the authority of a priest or deacon.
- Some bishops receive the honorary title of cardinal, which means that, as a member of the College of Cardinals, they have the responsibility of electing a new pope when a pope dies.
- The Catholic Church puts forth a claim of papal infallibility. This means that when the pope speaks *ex cathedra*, or from his seat of authority, on matters of faith or morals, his position must be held by the whole Catholic Church. However, many Catholics do not follow the Vatican's positions on matters some would consider in the realm of personal morality, such as birth control.
- Virtually all Christian churches teach that there are important rituals that serve as powerful channels for God's grace; these are known as sacraments. The Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches observe seven sacraments—baptism, confirmation, Eucharist (communion or “Lord's Supper”), penance (confession), last rites (known as extreme unction), holy orders (joining the priesthood), and matrimony.

- Both Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy feature venerated saints. A person becomes a saint when he or she is canonized by the church. This normally comes only after a long process to fully understand his or her character and also to confirm that at least two miracles can be attributed to the person.
- Devotion to Mary, the mother of Jesus, is also an important feature among many Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christians. A common practice is praying the rosary, using a chain of beads to count recitations of prayers including the Hail Mary.
- Mary has held an important place in the hearts of many Christians for centuries. Catholic, Orthodox, and many Anglican churches celebrate the Assumption of Mary, which marks Mary's bodily ascent into Heaven at the end of her life. The event is usually celebrated on August 15.



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Vatican City, a tiny independent nation within the borders of the city of Rome, is the administrative and spiritual heart of the Roman Catholic religion.

- Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy feature a great number of intermediaries, such as priests, angels, and saints—beings that serve as channels or mediate the connection between human beings and God. Angels are understood as purely spiritual beings who serve as messengers and instruments of God, and many people believe they have a guardian angel who watches over them.

Monasticism and Mysticism

- As early as the 4th century, some Christians moved toward leaving society behind and living an ascetic life devoted fully to God. This was the origin of Christian monasticism.
- One of the most influential monastic rules was created by Saint Benedict in the 6th century. His rule discusses how to live a Christian life, focusing on qualities such as poverty, humility, and obedience, and also how to run a monastery, with sections dedicated to the responsibilities of an abbot. The Benedictine Order consists of those monasteries and abbeys that follow the Rule of Saint Benedict.
- During the medieval period, new orders and movements arose. In some cases, the order featured mendicant friars who worked and taught among the people, rather than living a cloistered life. The Dominicans, an order founded to teach correct doctrine, spread the Gospel, and refute heresies, dates back to the 13th century and produced many theologians, the greatest of whom was Thomas Aquinas.
- The life of Saint Francis of Assisi—the 13th-century merchant's son who, following a spiritual transformation, lived a life of poverty, begging, preaching, and caring for lepers—served as the inspiration for the Franciscans.
- In the 16th century, Ignatius of Loyola founded the Society of Jesus, or Jesuits, a religious order requiring vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Their focus on education resulted in the founding of numerous schools, including many highly regarded colleges and universities.

- Mysticism, as we have seen, can be understood as involving a direct experience of God. Saint Francis’s spiritual transformation was ignited by a mystical experience in which he saw Jesus in a vision and received instruction from him. He retained this deep connection with God throughout this life.
- One notable feature of Catholic mysticism is that it sometimes involved women. While women did not have access to authority as priests or, for the most part, theologians, they did have a spiritual authority. Well-known women mystics include Julian of Norwich in the 14th century.

Two Important Theologians

- There are many great Catholic theologians, but two stand out. The first is Augustine of Hippo, who lived from 354–430. Saint Augustine is perhaps best known for writing what might be the first autobiography in the West, his *Confessions*, in which he writes about his conversion to Christianity.
- Augustine was an influential formulator of the Christian understandings of sin, evil, and grace, and he is admired by Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant churches.
- During the medieval period, Christian theology featured an approach known as scholasticism, in which logic and reasoning were used to harmonize seeming contradictions and analyze important concepts within Christian thought.
- The most influential scholastic is Thomas Aquinas, who lived in the 13th century. One of Aquinas’s most enduring contributions is the *Summa Theologica*, which contains five arguments for the existence of God, as well as his discussion of ethics.
- One of the most important modern theological movements is liberation theology, which articulates Christian faith in terms of a commitment to liberate the poor and oppressed and join them in a struggle against systems that perpetuate injustice.

- The Catholic Church underwent a major transformation with the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). One change was to allow greater participation of laypeople and, most significantly, to permit the use of vernacular languages in the celebration of the mass (prior to this, the mass was conducted solely in Latin).

The Eastern Orthodox Church

- The Eastern Orthodox churches together represent the second largest Christian community after the Roman Catholic Church, with approximately 300 million followers. A significant majority of its members are found in Greece, Russia, Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria, and Serbia. There are also significant minorities of Orthodox Christians throughout the Middle East, including Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan.
- Whereas the Roman Catholic Church is unified under the pope, there are a number of autonomous patriarchates and self-governing churches in the Eastern Orthodox world. Bishops have authority over individual territories.
- There is a greater emphasis on mystical practices by Orthodox Christians. In Orthodox theology, human beings aim to achieve *theosis*, which is understood as a union of the individual with God. Practices, such as meditation, cultivate consciousness of God and enable people to become more Christlike.
- The Eastern Orthodox churches are also known for their use of icons in worship. They do not aim for realism. Orthodox theologians believe once God took human form, it became permissible to use images to focus the mind on Jesus (or the saints).
- A distinctive feature of Orthodox worship services is their reliance on chanting. As opposed to Catholic services, which feature spoken prayer, readings, as well as singing and organ music, Orthodox services are almost exclusively chanted (except for the sermon).

Suggested Reading

Atwood, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*.

Augustine, *Confessions*.

Boff and Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*.

Gomes, *The Good Book*.

Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*.

Holt, *Thirsty for God*.

Marty, *The Christian World*.

Matlins and Magida, *How to Be a Perfect Stranger*.

McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*.

———, *The Christian Theology Reader*.

Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*.

Pagels, *Beyond Belief*.

———, *The Gnostic Gospels*.

Sharma, *Our Religions*.

Smith, *The World's Religions*.

Van Vorst, *Anthology of World Scriptures*.

Questions to Consider

1. What are some of the differences between the teachings of Jesus and the letters of Paul? In what ways can Paul be understood as the founder of Christianity?
2. What is your understanding of original sin? How can human beings be sinful yet created in the image of God?
3. Do you think the pope should have the authority to rule on birth control? Why or why not?

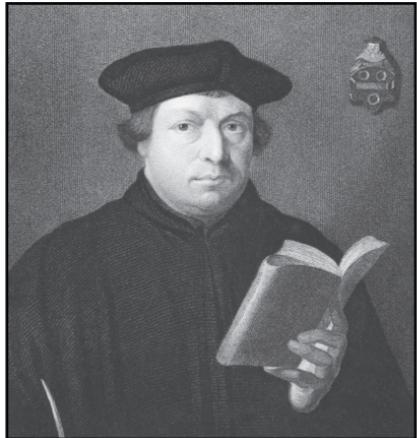
Protestantism and Christianity Today

Lecture 18

At various times in history, when there is the right combination of theological, political, and economic factors and there emerge remarkable thinkers whose ideas are powerful enough to shake the foundations of entrenched institutions, religious reform movements erupt. In 16th-century Europe, it happened in Christianity with the Protestant Reformation.

Martin Luther and the 95 Theses

- In the 16th century, the Roman Catholic Church was wealthy and powerful. Part of this wealth came from such questionable methods as selling indulgences, which brought about the alleviation of punishment for sin by paying with money.
- Martin Luther, a monk and priest, was disturbed by these practices and the theology behind them. Justification, for Luther, came through faith alone, *sola fide*, which is itself a gift of grace from God.
- In 1517, to promote debate on these issues, Luther wrote a document called the 95 Theses and nailed them to the door of the castle church at Wittenberg. He was threatened by the pope with excommunication and was ordered to appear before secular authorities at the Diet of Worms. However, Luther would not recant.

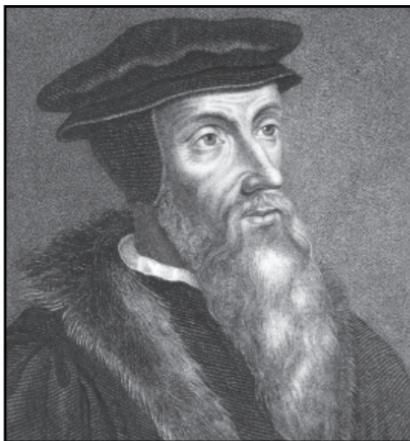


Martin Luther's 95 Theses provided the spark for the Protestant Reformation.

- Cut off by the church, Luther turned to German princes for support. Luther believed clergy should lead and support the church community without having a higher spiritual status. He also believed people should have a direct connection with God. He wanted people to read the Bible for themselves. In 1534, he published his own German translation of the Bible.
- The Protestant movement, as it became known, has remained Bible-centered. Furthermore, Luther, who condemned priestly celibacy based on his reading of scripture, married in 1525. This set the precedent of married clergy, which has remained the norm in Protestant Christianity.
- The Lutheran denomination recognizes only two of the seven sacraments seen in Catholicism—baptism and communion.

John Calvin

- John Calvin was a French theologian who went to Switzerland, where he brought new forms of worship, theology, and church governance. Calvin developed the doctrine of original sin by arguing a position of predestination, whereby some people are saved by God's grace (for reasons known to God alone), while others are predestined for damnation.
- It is one's works that reveal whether or not one is among the elect (those chosen to be saved). Calvinism ultimately achieved the status of state religion in Scotland and has been influential in other countries as well, such as England and the United States. Calvinist



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John Calvin's theology emphasized original sin and predestination.

theology is the foundation of what are known as the Reformed Churches, which include the Presbyterian denomination.

Henry VIII's Desire to Divorce—The Anglican Church

- The Lutheran and Reformed churches are representative of what we can unproblematically call Protestantism. There are other churches that broke with Rome that share certain features with Protestant Christianity but differ in significant ways. One example is the Anglican Church and its primary American form, the Episcopal Church.
- The Anglican Church formed when King Henry VIII wanted to divorce his first wife. Catholic authorities refused to grant him an annulment. There was also strong English nationalism at the time. Henry then broke with the Catholic Church, and the new Church of England was formed.
- Some consider the Anglican Church Protestant, since it shares with Lutheran and Calvinist churches features such as commitment to scripture as primary authority, the acceptance of two sacraments (baptism and communion), and prayer in the vernacular. The Anglican Church also shares features with the Catholic Church, such as the acceptance of the Nicene Creed, the apostolic succession of bishops, and an emphasis on ritual and imagery.
- An important contribution that the Church of England made to both Christianity and the English language is the King James Bible, published in the early 17th century and named for its sponsor, King James I of Great Britain. The translation had a profound effect on the English language, and it has been called “the most celebrated book in the English-speaking world.”
- Methodism is a revival movement that began within the Anglican Church but ultimately broke off. It began with John Wesley in the 18th century at Oxford University, where groups of students would meet in an effort to methodically (hence their name) determine and

live out a holy life. The emphasis is on a personal relationship with Jesus and living this out through service to others.

Radical Reform Groups

- Thus far, we have seen three categories of denominations that split from the Catholic Church—Lutheran, Calvinist/Reformist, and Anglican. In addition to these, there are those Christians who form what is often called the “radical reformation.”
- The communities that grew out of this movement, the largest of which are the Baptists, practice adult baptism. Baptists in America are a very diverse group, and they have been divided over many issues throughout their history, including slavery and civil rights.
- Other groups that arose from the radical reform movement, such as the Anabaptists, Amish, and Mennonites, aim to follow the teachings of Jesus as closely as possible, and advocate various degrees of separatism from the world.
- Another form that departed radically from traditional Christianity of Catholics and Protestants is the Quakers, which traces its origins back to England in the mid-17th century. Like the Anabaptists, Quakers are committed to pacifism. Quakers believe that God can speak directly to human beings in a quiet voice that one must be still and attend to in order to hear.
- Unitarian theology is based on the belief that God is one—a unity—and not a trinity. Nevertheless, most Unitarians see Jesus as a moral authority, an example to be followed, and one through whom a worshipper can gain a deep connection with God.
- One of the most well-known churches within this movement is the Unitarian Universalist (UU) church in America. UU congregations affirm seven principles, which include a commitment to the inherent worth of every person. They look to all of the world’s religions for guidance.

- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints—also known as the LDS or Mormon Church—is an American religion that became a world religion.
- The church’s origins can be traced back to its American founder, Joseph Smith, who said an angel guided him to a hillside under which golden plates were buried. Smith translated these plates into the Book of Mormon (named for Mormon, the prophet who compiled the text) and aimed to create a holy city for his young church.
- After Smith was killed by an Illinois mob in 1844, Brigham Young took over and the Mormons founded Salt Lake City, Utah, which is still the location of the LDS Headquarters today.
- Mormons differ from other forms of Christianity in a number of significant ways. They accept the authority of the Book of Mormon and believe that ancient prophets who lived in America contributed to its writings. Their claim that Jesus appeared in America after his resurrection is rejected by other Christians. In the early history of the church, Mormons were committed to plural marriage (or polygamy); the church renounced that practice in 1890.

Describing Christianity

- There are four terms that you are likely to encounter in descriptions of Christianity: evangelical, fundamentalist, Pentecostal, and liberal.
- One of the main features of the evangelical movement is the emphasis on having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and, in particular, the experience of being “born again” into this relationship.
- Surveys have shown that evangelicals make up between 25–29 percent of the American population, and the movement has shown significant growth in recent decades.

- One can find Christians who define themselves as evangelical in many different denominations. Many evangelicals today belong to churches that describe themselves as nondenominational, meaning that the churches are not bound to the institutional or authority structure of a formal denomination.
- Over the past 50 years, a growing number of such churches have attained populations numbering in the thousands; many of these are in the United States, and some of the largest are in South Korea. These are known as megachurches, with over 2,000 weekly attendees. These megachurches often offer their members everything from Bible classes and counseling support to sports leagues and movie nights.
- The fundamentalist movement developed in the late 19th–early 20th century. In 1910, five fundamentals were affirmed: (1) biblical inerrancy; (2) the virgin birth of Jesus; (3) the atonement theory of Christ’s death; (4) the bodily resurrection of Christ; and (5) the historical, objective reality of Jesus’s miracles.
- Fundamentalists tend to hold that the Bible is true not just theologically, but also historically and scientifically. They also tend to have a literalist approach to interpretation. This puts fundamentalists at odds with both modern biblical scholarship and science (particularly in regard to evolution).
- In addition to these first five fundamentals, another element was added—a belief in a particular view of the end time, with a strong apocalyptic character. It is important to keep in mind that while most fundamentalists would describe themselves as evangelical Christians, many evangelicals are not fundamentalists.
- Another movement that crosses denominational lines is Pentecostalism. The word comes from the Pentecost, where the Holy Spirit came upon the early followers of Jesus. This movement emphasizes this experience of the Holy Spirit, and it has a strong focus on a personal, transformative encounter with God.

- Liberal or progressive Christianity is an approach that rejects dogma, biblical inerrancy, and literalism and advocates the use of reason and various methods of biblical criticism to interpret the scripture. Liberal Christians tend to want inclusive congregations, those that are open to Christians of all races, backgrounds, and sexual orientations.

Common Christian Rituals

- Sunday Christian worship often features readings from scripture, a sermon, and chanting or singing.
- One of the most important life-cycle rituals is baptism. In some Christian traditions, such as Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Anglican, the next important ritual is first communion, where a child (often seven or eight years old) partakes of the Eucharist for the first time.
- In many forms of Christianity, the next life-cycle ritual is confirmation, in which an adolescent, following a period of religious study, makes a personal commitment to Christianity and the church.
- Many Christians are married by a priest or minister in their church. While divorce is discouraged in all forms of Christianity, it is permitted in Eastern Orthodox and Protestant churches. It is prohibited by the Roman Catholic Church, but the Church allows annulments of marriages.
- In the Catholic Church, death rituals begin with the Last Rites. A priest anoints a sick or dying Catholic's forehead with oil while reciting prayers. After death occurs, Christian churches offer funeral services and burial rituals.

Suggested Reading

Armstrong, *The Battle for God*.

Atwood, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*.

Gomes, *The Good Book*.

Hillerbrand, *The Protestant Reformation*.

Holt, *Thirsty for God*.

Marty, *The Christian World*.

Matlins and Magida, *How to Be a Perfect Stranger*.

McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*.

———, *The Christian Theology Reader*.

Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*.

Sharma, *Our Religions*.

Smith, *The World's Religions*.

Van Vorst, *Anthology of World Scriptures*.

Questions to Consider

1. What are the most important differences between Protestants and Catholics? What are some of the commonalities found among Protestant denominations? What are some of the major differences among them?
2. What are some of the similarities and differences between evangelicals and fundamentalists?

Muhammad, Qur'an, and Islamic Civilization

Lecture 19

Islam is the second largest religious tradition in the world today. It has around 1.5 billion followers (between 20–25 percent of the world's population). It is also one of the fastest growing religions in the world and in the United States. Many Westerners study Islam because of a concern with geopolitical matters, but this is only a tiny fraction of the many reasons to study this religion.

Muslims and Islam

- The largest Muslim-majority country in the world is Indonesia. There have been Muslims in Africa since the time of Muhammad in the 7th century. No region of the world has more Muslims than South Asia.
- If you add the Muslim populations of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, you would get approximately 460 million Muslims, or nearly one-third of the world's Muslims. There are certain elements that are shared by virtually all observant Muslims.
- A “Muslim” is “one who submits,” so it refers to people while “Islam” refers to the tradition. But there is a difference between saying something is Muslim and saying that it is Islamic.
- For example, Turkey is a Muslim country, as almost all Turks are Muslims. But it would be misleading to call Turkey in the mid-20th century Islamic, as it was (and to a large degree still is) a secular country. However, we can certainly call Iran “Islamic” because its leaders claim to govern in accordance with Islam.

The Story of Muhammad

- In the 6th century, when Muhammad was born, the Arabian Peninsula was primarily a way to transport goods from one part

of the world to the other. Much of the population consisted of Bedouins, nomadic tribes that traveled in camel caravans.

- There was no unifying ideology that brought all of the tribes together. There were frequent raids, and people lived by a code of revenge and honor, where an offense had to be avenged.
- Another important feature of pre-Islamic Arabia was the emphasis on the spoken word and the value of eloquence. Poetry was highly valued, and bards sang of the history of the tribe, preserving the tradition through poetry.
- The religion of the time was largely polytheistic, and various deities were associated with natural forces, localities, and tribes.
- It was into this world that Muhammad was born in 570, in Mecca, and was orphaned at an early age. In his 20s, he began work in the caravan business for the widow Khadija.
- According to tradition, Muhammad was illiterate, but possessed excellent judgment and good people skills. Muhammad and Khadija fell in love, and when he was 25 and she was 40, they married. They had sons who died in infancy, and several daughters, including Fatima, who would become an important figure. He had a monogamous marriage with Khadija for 24 years until her death.
- Muhammad would frequently meditate in the caves around Mecca. In 610 in the month of Ramadan, when Muhammad was 40, his life changed. While in a cave, he was visited by the Angel Gabriel. He was told to “recite”—*Iqra!*
- He responded, “I cannot. I am unlettered.” And then, the words started to pour out of him. This was the beginning of the revelation of the Qur’an—which itself means “recitation” or “reading.” The revelations would continue over the next 22 years.

- When he received these revelations, Muhammad would sweat heavily, would sometimes hear bells ringing, and would enter into a trance state. Muhammad would dictate the revelations to others. Only later would all of the fragments be assembled and compiled into the text we now know as the Qur'an.
- Muhammad began to deliver the message of the one God, where he met tremendous resistance. He even faced assassination attempts. In 619, he lost both his beloved wife Khadija and his uncle, who had acted as his protector after his parents died.
- At this moment in his life, the beleaguered Muhammad had a profound spiritual experience that would lift him up—his Night Journey from Mecca to Jerusalem. According to the tradition, he traveled on a flying steed from Mecca to Jerusalem in one night (a journey that usually took around a month). While there, he met earlier prophets, prayed with them, and then ascended into the heavens where he had an encounter with God.
- This encounter both educated him and inspired him. Some Muslims see this as a literal, physical journey; others see it as an inward, spiritual journey that took place “outside of time.”
- Muhammad’s reputation for integrity and fairness reached the city of Yathrib, where he was invited to help settle a tribal dispute. Muhammad and his followers moved to Yathrib—which would become known as the “city of the prophet”—or Medina. This journey, in 622, is known as the Hijra, the emigration. It is from this moment that the Islamic calendar is dated. This year cannot simply be calculated by subtracting 622 from the Western year, however; the Islamic calendar is lunar, not solar.
- The period after Muhammad’s arrival in Medina was the golden age of Islam. In 630, Muhammad and his followers bloodlessly took Mecca. Muhammad went to the ritual center known as the Ka’bah and smashed the idols, rededicating the Ka’bah to God.

- By the time of Muhammad’s death in 632, nearly all of Arabia followed Islam. The Qur’an emphasizes that Muhammad, like all prophets, is just a human being and must not be worshipped. All worship must be directed to God alone. Muhammad was buried in Medina, with a mosque built around his grave. Medina is the second most important pilgrimage site in Islam after Mecca.
- Muhammad is seen as the ideal person, the living expression of God’s will. He is sometimes called “The Living Qur’an,” as his life exemplifies what it is to be a true Muslim.

The Qur’an

- For Muslims, God’s words were in Arabic, and they can only be fully experienced in Arabic. While most Muslims in the world are not native Arabic speakers and cannot speak conversational Arabic, they learn to pray in Arabic and hear the call to prayer and Qur’anic chanting in Arabic.



For Muslims, the Qur’an can only truly be experienced in the original Arabic. Even the best translations can only approximate the word of God.

- The Qur'an consists of 114 chapters, which are called suras. Each sura is divided into passages called *ayas*.
- The Qur'an contains theological passages, laws, narratives, and poetic imagery. There is one theme that emerges strongly—*tawhid*, the oneness of God. Muslims are profoundly monotheistic. The oneness of God means the oneness of creation; all of us are related to each other. For many Muslims, life cannot be divided into secular and sacred spheres.
- In Islam, God must not be represented. In some forms of Islam, even human figures, especially prophets, should not be represented. The greatest, and the only unforgiveable, sin is *shirk*, which means putting something else on the level with God. This does not just mean a tribal deity or natural spirit. It can also mean money, or power, or fame.
- The Qur'an emphasizes that God can forgive anything if a person genuinely repents and seeks mercy—except for *shirk*. There is a Judgment Day in Islam, when each person will stand before God.
- Another Qur'anic theme is that the God of Islam is the same God worshipped by Jews and Christians. Muslims use the name “Allah” to refer to God. Allah simply means “the God,” the one God.

Connections with Judaism and Christianity

- Muslims believe that earlier prophets—including Adam, Abraham, Moses, John the Baptist, and Jesus—were prophets of God. Those prophets who brought with them a scripture—Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad—are considered messengers of God.
- Muslims see the revelations of Judaism and Christianity as authentic reminders from God, along with the Qur'an. For Muslims, the Qur'an is the only perfect revelation, as human involvement over time brought errors into the Bible and Torah.

- Judaism and Islam share a common ancestor: Abraham. Whereas the Jewish line goes through Isaac (Abraham-Isaac-Jacob), the Muslim line goes through Abraham's first son, the one he had with Hagar, Ishmael.
- Muslims believe that Jesus was born of a virgin, that he healed and worked miracles, and that he will return at the end times. However, Muslims do not believe that Jesus is divine, nor do they believe in the Trinity, for they believe that it compromises the unity of God. Muslims consider Jews and Christians to be fellow "Peoples of the Book" who have the potential to receive God's favor and attain Paradise at death.

Rules

- The Qur'an sometimes lays out specific rules that must be followed. Some deal with diet. Halal food simply means "permitted"; the opposite is haram, or "forbidden." The Qur'an forbids the consumption of alcohol, pork, and any meat that is not slaughtered in a ritually required way.
- There are also specific rules regarding women. In many ways, this 7th-century text empowered women in its time (and in some cases, in ways that were not equaled in Europe for centuries afterward).
- Women gained the right to a share of inheritance, to initiate a divorce proceeding, to retain their own property in marriage, and to testify in a legal proceeding. The number of wives a man could have was limited to four (before this, it was unlimited), and multiple wives would only be allowed if equal treatment was assured. Most Muslims today are monogamous.
- The Qur'an provides no details on appropriate attire for women; it just emphasizes the need for modesty. In the vast majority of Muslim countries, covering is not mandatory; it is a woman's choice. Only in more conservative countries like Saudi Arabia and Iran is covering required.

The Hadith

- While the Qur'an is the most important source of guidance and authority in Islam, there is another important source: the actions and words of the prophet Muhammad, known as the Sunna, meaning a "path" or "road." The majority branch of Islam, Sunni, takes its name from the Sunna (i.e., they are those who follow this path).
- The Hadith reports about Muhammad's words and deeds. Hadith were remembered by people who were with Muhammad and then passed down stories orally before writing them down. After Muhammad's death, the number of Hadith exceeded 100,000, so scholars developed a science of Hadith authentication.

Muslim Contributions to the World

- At its height, the Muslims would create the most advanced culture in the world. From the 8th to the 13th centuries, Baghdad became a center of culture, scholarship, and science. Muslim Spain, Andalusia, has been described as "a culture where there was extensive cooperation ... among Muslims, Jews, and Christians, and where civilization touched a point hardly surpassed since 5th-century Athens."
- In Baghdad during the Abbasid Caliphate, Muslim scholars preserved and translated ancient Greek and Roman texts, thus enabling classical philosophy to survive (paving the way for the European Renaissance). We owe an invaluable debt to the thinkers of this time and place: Arabic numerals; algebra; developments in medicine; gains in optics and hygiene; the creation of teaching hospitals; and during this period, the Islamic law schools developed.

Suggested Reading

Al-Qur'an: A Contemporary Translation.

Armstrong, Muhammad.

Atwood, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States.*

Cleary, *The Essential Koran*.
Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*.
———, *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam*.
Esposito and Mogahed, *Who Speaks for Islam?*
The Holy Qur'an.
Matlins and Magida, *How to Be a Perfect Stranger*.
Nasr, *The Heart of Islam*.
Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an*.
Sells, *Approaching the Qur'an*.
Sharma, *Our Religions*.
Smith, *The World's Religions*.
Van Voorst, *Anthology of World Scriptures*.

Questions to Consider

1. Why was Muhammad so successful in spreading the message of Islam? What role was played by the content and form of the Qur'anic revelations?
2. How is the concept of unity significant in Islam? What is *shirk*, and why is it so strongly condemned?
3. What connections does Islam have with Christianity and Judaism?

Unity in Islam—The Five Pillars

Lecture 20

The unifying factors for observant Muslims are a set of beliefs and practices that are obligatory: the Five Pillars of Islam. The grouping is found in Hadith, particularly in a famous Hadith featuring the angel Gabriel (*Jibril* in Arabic) explaining the essence of Islam.

The First and Second Pillars—The Shahada and the Call to Prayer

- The First Pillar of Islam is a statement, the *shahadah*, and proclaims, “There is no God but God”—a statement of Tawhid. The second part states, “and Muhammad is the Messenger of God.” The *shahadah* is written on the flag of Saudi Arabia, and this statement is a central part of the Call to Prayer.
- Prayer (*salat*) is the Second Pillar and the pillar that is most deeply woven into the daily lives of Muslims. The ideal is to pray five times a day, at daybreak, noon, midafternoon, sunset, and evening. The exact times are now available on most mosques’ websites, so Muslims can set an alarm to remind them to pray.
- The pillar of prayer is the way that Muslims follow a sacred rhythm amidst the other rhythms of their lives.
- The first words are *Allahu Akbar*, meaning “God is great,” or “God is greater.” After four repetitions of this, the next part of the call is the expression of the *shahadah*. *Ashadhu An* means “I bear witness” that there is no God but God, and Muhammad is his messenger.
- Next, there is the literal call—Come to Prayer (said twice), followed by Come to Flourishing, a reminder of how important prayer is. For morning prayers, a phrase is added—“Prayer is better than sleep.”

- At the end, *Allahu Akbar* is once again proclaimed, followed by the first part of the *shahadah*, the affirmation of the oneness of God—*La Illaha Illa Allah*.
- Muslims can pray with other Muslims or alone. All mosques separate the sexes in some way. The issue of male/female separation is something that is being discussed by Muslim feminists.
- When entering a mosque, shoes are always taken off before going into the prayer room. Women will cover their heads, often with a scarf, and men may cover their heads with a cap or hat. Before taking part in prayer, Muslims clean themselves ritually, washing their hands, mouth and nose, face, arms, head, ears, and feet.
- The prayer room itself has no pews. Worshippers sit on the floor.
- In most mosques, there are basically two parts to the ritual: a khutbah, or sermon, from the imam, and the actual prayer itself.
- During the khutbah, people will be sitting on the floor around the prayer room, listening. The imam will usually discuss passages from the Qur'an and from the Hadith and will apply these passages to the lives of this congregation and present day concerns.
- At the moment of prayer itself, everyone stands shoulder to shoulder and faces the mihrab, a niche in the wall that indicates the direction of prayer toward Mecca. The imam then chants from the Qur'an and the worshippers go through repeated cycles of postures. At the end, everyone turns their head to the right and then to the left, wishing each other peace.
- In the posture of full prostration, worshippers get on their knees and put their foreheads on the ground. This is a posture of complete submission and dependence.

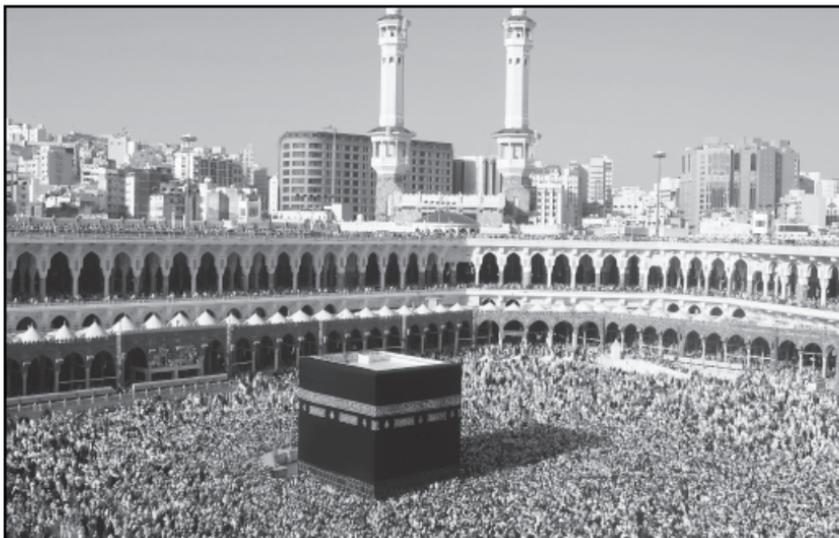
The Third and Fourth Pillars—Zakat and Ramadan

- The Third Pillar is zakat, or alms-giving. Muslims are expected to give a certain percentage of their wealth (around 2.5 percent) to support the poor, orphans and widows, and Islam.
- The Fourth Pillar of Islam is the fast during the month of Ramadan. During Ramadan, Muslims abstain from food, drink, smoking, and sex from dawn to sunset.
- Each day, after the sun goes down, the fast is broken with a meal called the *iftar* meal. During Ramadan, Muslims are committed to undertaking greater acts of piety, such as giving more to the poor.
- Ramadan is a time to cultivate self-discipline, to refrain from automatically seeking desire satisfaction so that our attention can be turned to matters of eternal importance rather than momentary pleasure, to obligation rather than appetite, to God rather than self.
- After the end of the month-long fast of Ramadan comes the biggest holiday of the Islamic year: Eid al-Fitr. There is a special prayer done in the morning (in addition to the usual five obligatory prayers) in community. The holiday period of Eid al-Fitr, from one to three days long, is a time when the family gathers, feasts, and exchanges gifts. The common greeting given at this time is “*Eid mubarak*,” or “Blessed Eid.”

The Fifth Pillar—The Hajj

- The Fifth Pillar of Islam is the Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia that all Muslims who are physically and financially able are expected to make at least once during their lives. The Hajj takes place from the 8th to the 12th day of the last month of the Islamic calendar.
- The Hajj is the largest annual pilgrimage on earth, with between 2 and 3 million people attending each year. Only Muslims are allowed into the sacred city of Mecca. It connects Muslims in three ways: it connects them with God, with their history, and with each other.

- When on the Hajj, pilgrims wear white ritual clothing. For many, the clothing they wear on the Hajj is saved and used as a funeral shroud when they die. On the Hajj, each pilgrim is simply a human being standing before God.
- Thousands upon thousands of Muslims will circumambulate the Ka'bah together. The crowd walks around the Ka'bah seven times counterclockwise, the direction symbolizing that this takes place outside of ordinary time.
- The Ka'bah is the black, cube-shaped structure in the center of the mosque in Mecca. Pilgrims try to touch or kiss the sacred stone, but given the size of the crowd, many are able to only gesture toward it.
- During the Hajj, Muslims perform many ritual actions that are symbolic of, or re-create, important historical events, where Muhammad gave his final sermon, standing before God in humility and repentance.



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The Ka'bah at Mecca is the destination of the Hajj, or pilgrimage, which all Muslims must make once in their lifetimes if physically and financially possible.

- Toward the end of the pilgrimage is the second major Islamic holiday, Eid al-Adha, the festival of sacrifice. Muslims sacrifice an animal, such as a sheep or cow, to commemorate God’s substitution of a ram for sacrifice instead of Abraham’s son Ishmael. Some Muslims also see this as symbolizing the sacrifice of one’s ego before God.
- A Muslim who completes the Hajj is given the honorific title “Hajji.” Most Muslims who perform the Hajj are deeply affected by it. In many cases, Muslims get a firsthand experience of the tremendous diversity of Islam, as they pray alongside Muslims from every part of the world.

The Concept of Jihad

- In some discussions of Islam, there is talk about a sixth pillar, the concept of jihad. The actual meaning of jihad is “effort” or “struggle.” It is the effort necessary to walk the straight path, to live in accordance with what God wills.
- Some people equate the term with holy war. Part of the struggle necessary for Muslims may take the form of battle against those who threaten them, as occurred in the early years of the tradition. However, there are strict rules of engagement that govern this type of jihad, and they are spelled out in the Qur’an and Hadith.
- There is an Islamic just war doctrine, and there are many limitations on how warfare can be conducted. Among them, warfare must be defensive and must not involve targeting civilians, women, or children. The Qur’an states, “Fight those in the way of God who fight you, but do not be aggressive; God does not like aggressors. ... If they desist, then cease to be hostile.”
- Ultimately, however, the kind of jihad that involves fighting is considered the “lesser jihad.” The highest jihad is the inner jihad, the struggle to keep our worst impulses at bay so that we can follow the straight path.

Islamic Law

- Islamic law is often used as a translation for the Arabic word Shari'a, but that isn't quite right. Muslims who say that they want to live in accordance with Shari'a often mean that they want to live in accordance with God's will. The notion of law, in terms of jurisprudence, is conveyed by the word *fiqh*.
- There are four commonly accepted sources of Shari'a, although these are understood and applied differently. The first source is the Qur'an. The second source is the Sunna, which is known through the Hadith.
- The thousands of Hadith provide a great deal of material, but since the Qur'an and the Hadith cannot directly address the countless developments that have arisen since the 7th century, there are two other sources consulted.
- The third source is *ijma*, or consensus of the community. Concepts like *ijma* can contribute to a system of Islamic democracy. The final source is *qiyas*, or analogical reasoning. In Islam, not only are the texts and the community given authority, but there is also a place for individual reasoning.
- As you look around the Islamic world, you can see dramatic differences in how the law develops. The process of striving to interpret and apply the teachings of Islam is called *ijtihad*, which is etymologically related to the term jihad—it is a kind of “intellectual effort.”
- After law schools were established, some Muslims believed that the “doors of *ijtihad*” were closed. However, many Muslim thinkers advocate “reopening the doors of *ijtihad*,” taking a new look at the sources with the eyes of modern individuals.

How Legal Opinions Are Issued

- Qualified Muslim scholars and jurists can issue legal opinions, known as fatwas, on issues of interest to Muslims. If you have

a question regarding whether or not a particular practice is in accord with Islam, you can ask a scholar, who will issue a fatwa giving you the opinion along with his reasoning (which will almost certainly include passages from the Qur’an and Hadith, along with other precedents from Islamic legal rulings and analogical argumentation).

- There is no centralized authority in Islam—nothing equivalent to a pope—so many Muslims seek guidance from authorities whom they respect and with whom they have a relationship.

Suggested Reading

Atwood, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*.

Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*.

———, *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam*.

Esposito and Mogahed, *Who Speaks for Islam?*

Matlins and Magida, *How to Be a Perfect Stranger*.

Nasr, *The Heart of Islam*.

Sharma, *Our Religions*.

Smith, *The World’s Religions*.

Van Vorst, *Anthology of World Scriptures*.

Questions to Consider

1. What is the significance of fasting during Ramadan for Muslims? How does Ramadan in Islam compare with Lent in Christianity?
2. How do you think Muslims who go on the Hajj are changed by the experience?
3. Explain the terms “jihad” and “Shari’a” in the larger context of Islam.

Forms of Islam—Diversity among Muslims

Lecture 21

A central concept in Islam is Tawhid, unity. There is certainly a sense that Muslims think of themselves as a worldwide community, an *ummah*. Still, conflicts among Muslims have been occurring since the earliest period of the tradition, and Muslim-on-Muslim violence is occurring throughout the world at a disturbing rate today. What has caused the rifts within the Muslim community?

Sunnis, Shi'ites, and Sufis

- Within Islam, the most significant doctrinal division is between Sunnis and Shi'ites. This division has its origin in a dispute over who would succeed Muhammad as leader of the Muslim community after his death.
- There were two primary positions on this. One group believed that the successor should be Muhammad's most loyal companion, Abu Bakr. The other group believed that the successor should come from Muhammad's family line, namely his cousin and son-in-law, Ali.
- When Abu Bakr became the khalifa (or caliph), many of the loyal supporters of Ali, known as *shia-tu-Ali*, or "partisans of Ali," were unhappy. This form of Islam became known as "Shia," and its followers are often called "Shi'ites" in English.
- While the Sunni notion of Muhammad's successor was focused on the office of caliph, the Shia believed in a line of imams. Here "imam" refers to an authoritative religious leader who in some cases is understood to be a divinely inspired, infallible interpreter of God's will.
- The difference between Sunni and Shia is not just about Muhammad's successor but about the nature of leadership itself. Shia imams were far more than temporal leaders; rather, they

were direct bloodline descendants of Muhammad with significant religious authority.

- There are many branches of Shia, and the distinctions in these branches are primarily related to who they believe were the legitimate successors of Ali and Husayn. The most populous branch is known as the Twelvers.
- While the conflict over the succession of Muhammad and the different conceptions of authority explain much about the difference between Sunni and Shia, much of the tension and suspicions between these two groups today comes more from past mistreatment and grievances.
- Sufism is the mystical branch of Islam. Mysticism can be a tricky word to define, but it points to the path that leads to a direct experience of ultimate reality, which here would mean a direct encounter with God.
- There are three primary Sufi streams: ascetic, contemplative, and devotional. Sufi asceticism did not take the form of severe austerities or world-denying renunciation. Rather, it was an emphasis on simplicity, inwardness, and piety.
- This leads to the second strain: the contemplative. Sufism employs a range of techniques to connect the seeker to God. Such techniques can include meditation, prayer, and chanting. Finally, there is the devotional strand, which is perhaps the most powerful.
- Sufis are organized into orders, which are known as brotherhoods or sisterhoods. Most Sufis are not celibate, and they do not live with the order full time. They usually have jobs and families, as Islam has generally rejected celibacy and monasticism.
- Sufi brotherhoods engage in a range of activities, the most important being the rituals known as dhikr, which means “remembrance.” These often involve rhythmic, repetitive chanting and recitation

that bring about a deep state of awareness of, or even absorption in, God.

- The ultimate goal of the Sufi is to get the ego or self out of the way so that the practitioner can fully experience union with God.
- We cannot leave our discussion of Sufism without an example of Sufi devotional poetry. The best known is by Jalal ad-Din Rumi, a 13th-century writer. Many of the Sufi themes we have been discussing, such as the need to dissolve the boundaries around the self and the pursuit of an intimate, direct connection with God, can be found in his poems.



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The whirling dance of the dervish is a form of Sufi Muslim worship, designed to clear the mind for God.

Colonization and Reactions

- In the 18th and 19th centuries, almost every part of the Muslim world was colonized by European powers. Muslims felt disempowered and humiliated.
- The range of responses to colonization tended to cluster in three categories. The first argued that the decline in the Muslim world was due to a departure from the straight path of Islam. The answer, therefore, was to return to true Islam and to reject the West.
- On the opposite side of the spectrum was the second response—imitate the West. Focus on modernization through secularization and Westernization. The third position posed a middle alternative. Modernize, but in an Islamic way.

- This Islamic modernism emerged largely during the 19th century and argued that Islam would be its essence but Western ideas and technology could be selectively adapted as long as they did not conflict with Islam. Social equality, the sovereignty of the people, and science were not Western innovations, modernists argued, but were actually part of the Islamic tradition all along.
- A radically different approach was seen in Saudi Arabia's Wahhabi movement, founded by Muhammad ibn Abd Al-Wahhab in the 18th century. Wahhabis focus on doctrinal orthodoxy, and condemn (and often repress) Shi'ites and Sufis. They advocate a literalist approach to interpretation and a strict application of the law.
- Wahhabism became the official religious ideology of Saudi Arabia and, due to Saudi oil wealth, has been exported throughout the Muslim world.
- There is a diverse modern movement that advocates a greater role for Islam in the lives of individual Muslims as well as the state. A general characteristic of this movement is the need to return to Islam. Islam must apply to all areas of life: politics, economics, family life, et cetera. The terms that scholars use to capture this view include Islamic revivalism, Islamic resurgence, Islamism, and political Islam.
- Within the category of Islamic revivalism are many groups with differing agendas, goals, and methods. They range from groups committed to peaceful change and democracy to militant organizations that advocate the violent overthrow of any governments that are not truly Islamic in their eyes.

The Muslim Brotherhood

- The most important and influential revivalist organization is the Society of Muslim Brothers, or the Muslim Brotherhood. It was formed in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna, who was angered by British economic and military domination in Egypt.

- Branches of the Muslim Brotherhood are found throughout the Muslim world, and their goal is to establish an Islamic society peacefully, through social organizations, the press, and, where they can, participating in elections (although some offshoots of the group have advocated and carried out violent action).
- One of the groups that has its origins in the Muslim Brotherhood is Hamas, the Palestinian Islamist group governing the Gaza Strip. Founded in 1987, Hamas, which is an acronym for the Arabic term for “Islamic Resistance Movement,” brought Islamism into the movement for Palestinian statehood. Whereas the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and its affiliated political party, Fatah, is largely secular, Hamas wants the Palestinian state to be an Islamic one.

Progressive Islam

- There is a side of Islam that most Westerners never see—what is often called progressive Islam. Progressive Islam tends to feature prominent themes including democracy, human rights, and individual liberties; that individuals should be free to interpret the Qur’an with their reason and conscience; equality of men and women; a commitment to interfaith dialogue; and a commitment to nonviolence wherever possible.

American Islam

- Islam is one of America’s fastest growing religions. This is not simply due to immigration. Americans have been converting to Islam at the rate of around 20,000 per year in recent years. However, nobody knows how many Muslims live in America, and the estimates vary dramatically. The lowest estimates are around 3 million, and the highest are around 7 million.
- Muslims have been in America for centuries, and American Muslims are a very diverse group, coming from every part of the Muslim world.

- There is a wide range of levels of observance among American Muslims. Generally speaking, American Muslims are better integrated into American society than Muslims in many European countries, like France or England, are into their societies.
- At the same time, many Muslims feel that despite the fact that they consider themselves faithful Muslims and loyal Americans, non-Muslim Americans do not fully accept them and often portray them unfairly.
- In late 2011, the reality show *All-American Muslim* premiered. The show centers on Arab-American Muslim families in Dearborn, Michigan, and it features ordinary American Muslims with diverse levels of religious commitment and worldviews.
- Between 25–30 percent of all American Muslims are African-American. Scholars estimate that up to 20 percent of African slaves brought to America were Muslim. It is difficult to know the number with any certainty, because Christianity was forced on them, so Muslims had to practice in secret. The historical record does contain evidence that some slaves would not eat pork and prayed to Allah.
- Many African-American Muslims are drawn to Islam because there is a sense that they are returning to a tradition that was taken from them. African-American converts often relinquish their given names, which are considered names forced on their ancestors by slave owners, and embrace Muslim names (Cassius Clay becoming Muhammad Ali; Lew Alcindor becoming Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, etc.).

The Nation of Islam and the American Society of Islam

- The organization responsible for bringing many African-Americans into Islam, especially during the 1950s–1970s, is the Nation of Islam. The Nation began when a man named Wallace D. Fard began to preach in the black community in Detroit in 1930.

- Fard's most important follower was Elijah Muhammad. Elijah Muhammad taught that Fard was a manifestation of Allah and thus divine. Elijah Muhammad himself claimed to be a prophet, and taught that blacks, but not whites, were creations of God. The Nation of Islam was literally seen as a separate nation, and its members would have no obligation to the United States.
- Elijah Muhammad's most famous follower was Malcolm X, who would rise to become the public face of the Nation of Islam. Malcolm X was drawn to the Nation of Islam while in prison. In recent decades, many inmates have been drawn to Islam, and Muslim prayer groups can be found at most major prisons.
- Elijah Muhammad's son, Warith Deen Muhammad, and Malcolm X ultimately repudiated the racist teachings of the Nation of Islam and brought most African-American Muslims to mainstream Sunni Islam.
- At this point, there was a split that continues to this day. The vast majority of African-American Muslims ultimately followed Warith Deen Muhammad into his new organization, the American Society of Muslims. The Nation of Islam continued under Louis Farrakhan. In recent years, Farrakhan has softened some of his rhetoric and established more positive relations with mainstream Muslims.

Suggested Reading

Abdo, *Mecca and Main Street*.

Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft*.

Atwood, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*.

Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*.

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Esposito and Mogahed, *Who Speaks for Islam?*

Fadiman and Frager, *Essential Sufism*.

Matlins and Magid, *How to Be a Perfect Stranger*.

Nasr, *The Heart of Islam*.

Rūmī and Barks, *The Essential Rumi*.

Safi, *Progressive Muslims*.

Shah, *The Sufis*.

Sharma, *Our Religions*.

Smith, *The World's Religions*.

Van Vorst, *Anthology of World Scriptures*.

Questions to Consider

1. What is the difference between Sunnis and Shi'ites? What do they have in common? What accounts for the other divisions that exist among Muslims today?
2. With a friend, read and discuss a poem of Rumi, the great Sufi mystic poet.

Jains, Sikhs, and Baha'is

Lecture 22

In cultivating religious literacy, we certainly want to cover the most widely practiced religions. However, we must also pay attention to the smaller religions. For one thing, every religious tradition has elements that are fascinating and worthy of reflection. Also, a religion with a smaller number of adherents can have a disproportionately large impact on the cultures and societies of which it is a part.

The Jain Tradition

- There are 4.5–6 million Jains in the world. The majority lives in India, but there are growing immigrant communities in North America, Europe, Australia, and East Asia.
- Jainism began in India around the 6th century B.C.E. The founder of the tradition is known as Mahavira (“Great Hero”), and he is understood to be the 24th and last in a line of great enlightened teachers known as Tirthankaras. Because they conquered their passions and egos, conquered themselves, they are called Jinas, or “conquerers.” From this term we get the name of the Jain tradition.
- The Jain tradition rejects the notion of a supreme creator God. The main representations in Jain temples are statues of the Tirthankaras.
- The Jain tradition is one of the most ascetically demanding. Jains believe that each being has a jiva—a pure, eternal soul. And this truly means each and every being, from the most microscopic bug on up. This soul is reborn over and over again until it achieves liberation.
- For Jains, we live in a world surrounded by an endless number of suffering souls, each one of them worthy of compassion. For this reason, all Jains are strict vegetarians and the Jains have built and run animal hospitals.

- The souls of all beings are weighed down with karma, which Jains basically understand as a kind of material that binds the soul to this world.
- One can avoid accumulating great amounts of karma by living in a nonviolent way. One gets rid of existing karma by atonement, meditation, and service to others. But some monks go further, believing that austerities such as extended fasting can cleanse one of karma.
- One of the most extraordinary practices in the Jain tradition is fasting until death. While not done frequently, there are examples of Jain monks who have done this throughout history.

Sikhism

- Sikhs make up only about 2 percent of the Indian population, but they are far more influential than their size would indicate. A large majority of the world's Sikhs live in India (most of them in the Punjab region). There are roughly 25–30 million Sikhs in the world.
- In the Sikh tradition, the tradition began with a line of 10 gurus who lived from 1469 to 1708. These gurus are profoundly important in the shaping of the tradition; collectively, they laid the foundation for the Sikh religion.
- Guru Nanak, the founder, was born a Hindu in 1469. He was a spiritual seeker, drawn to both Hindu and Muslim holy people. At the age of 30, he was called up to the presence of God. Three days later, Nanak began to teach what he had learned. Guru Nanak's path was one that emphasized the unity of all human beings, and he promoted equality rather than caste distinction, tolerance rather than religious division and bigotry.
- Nanak settled in Punjab and established traditions of communal worship and eating that still characterize Sikh practice today. Before he died in 1539, he appointed his successor, and for nearly 200 years the Sikh community would be led by a guru.

- The tenth guru, Guru Gobind Singh, made a decision to bestow authority on the sacred text, the Adi Granth. It is considered the successor to the 10 gurus, and is the living guru of the Sikhs. This text has supreme authority.
- In the Sikh tradition, “guru” can refer to the original 10 gurus, the sacred text of the tradition, and to the ultimate guru, the source of all wisdom, God.
- Sikhs see God as formless and do not approve of the worship of icons. For Sikhs, God is reached particularly by a form of inner meditation that focuses on the divine name.
- Sikh worship takes place in a gurdwara. The heart of the service is the recitation of prayers, which are chanted by the granthi. Both men and women can be granthis, and the Sikh tradition emphasizes the equality of women.
- The holiest site for Sikhs is the Golden Temple, in the Punjab city of Amritsar. The Golden Temple complex, completed in 1604, glitters during the daytime and illuminates at night, sitting in the middle of a large rectangular reservoir with only one path to it.
- One of the most remarkable Sikh practices is the communal meal called the *langar*. The *langar* is a way to undermine caste distinction and promote unity. The meal is given free to all who ask, and it is prepared and served by volunteers, an example of the Sikh emphasis on service to the community.
- The Khalsa is a special order of Sikhs that, in theory, all observant Sikhs should aspire to join. It was founded by the 10th guru, Guru Gobind Singh, who wanted to create an elite order that would require courage and a willingness to publicly identify as Sikh and defend the order from attack.
- Members of the Khalsa adopt five articles of faith, each of which starts with the letter K in Punjabi; hence, they are known as the



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The Golden Temple in Amritsar, India, which houses the Adi Granth (or Guru Granth Sahib), the text that is now considered the Sikh guru.

Five *K*'s. The first is uncut hair, kept neatly combed. The hair is gathered up into a turban, so male Khalsa Sikhs are distinguished by their turbans. Women sometimes wear turbans but more often cover their heads with scarves.

- The third item is a simple circular bracelet. This bracelet is a symbol of the never-ending nature of God and a reminder to use the hands with restraint. The fourth item is a pair of short pants that are worn under the clothes, both to ensure that the Sikh is always ready for action (some even wear them while bathing), and also to remind Sikhs of the importance of self-control. The final item, the kirpan, is a small ceremonial blade that shows that the Sikh is ready to defend the innocent at all times. There is a strong emphasis on using the

kirpan only for defensive purposes. As Sikhs cannot carry kirpans on airplanes, some wear a symbolic pin with a kirpan on it until they can don their kirpan again.

- Some Sikhs have yearned for a separate nation for Sikhs, which they call Khalistan, and have at times taken political or military action to pursue this goal.
- Over time, some non-Indians have chosen to become Sikhs. One of the most famous orders of non-Indian Sikhs is known as the Healthy, Happy, Holy Organization (3HO) formed in 1971 by Yogi Bhaajan. This movement attracted many Americans (most of them Caucasian), who are known as “gora” or “white” Sikhs. They follow the Khalsa code, and both men and women wear turbans and white clothes.

The Baha’i Faith

- The Baha’i faith emerged in Persia from Shia Islam. The tradition has its origins with Siyyid Ali Muhammad, who in 1844 claimed to be “the Bab,” which is Arabic for “gate” or “doorway” because he announced that a future messenger of God would be sent. He was strongly opposed by the Shia religious authorities, who saw him as an apostate, and he was executed in 1850 at the age of 30.
- One of the central teachings in the Baha’i faith is that God sends prophets and messengers to humanity on an ongoing basis, a doctrine of continuous prophecy without end. Baha’is are monotheists who accept numerous prophets from other religious traditions, including Krishna, Buddha, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. It has a pluralistic theology that sees truth in many traditions.
- A key teaching of the Baha’i faith is unity—the unity of God, the human race, and all religions. Some of the main Baha’i principles include: (1) the elimination of all forms of prejudice; (2) equality between men and women; (3) universal education; and (4) harmony between science and religion and between nature and technology.

- Currently, there are approximately 5–7 million Baha'is in the world, and while this makes it a fairly small religion in terms of population, it is one of the fastest-growing and most widespread religions in the world, with members in over 220 countries. There are 150,000–170,000 Baha'is in the United States.
- Much of Baha'i worship happens in homes or private spaces. There is no clergy in the Baha'i Faith. Rather, it is administered by a combination of elected councils and appointed advisers. Members assemble every 19 days for feasting, community, and worship (the Baha'i calendar consists of 19 months of 19 days each and is adjusted to the solar year). Baha'is observe 11 holy days, and they engage in prayer and meditation, abstain from alcohol and gambling, and fast from sunrise to sunset for 19 consecutive days (from March 2–March 20) each year.
- One of the main symbols of the Baha'i Faith is a nine-pointed star. The number nine is seen as symbolizing perfection and fulfillment. The word “Baha” itself, meaning “the Glorious,” is known as the Greatest Name, a reference to Baha'u'llah, and is often depicted in calligraphy.
- There are seven Baha'i Houses of Worship in the world, all in different continents. There are no rituals or sermons given, and the scriptures of the Baha'i Faith, as well as other traditions, can be read or recited inside. The Houses of Worship are built as nine-sided structures, and some of these buildings are architectural marvels.

New Religions

- We see that new religions are continuously emerging, and while we call them new, they always are, in some ways, connected with and shaped by older traditions.
- In East Asia, new religions have attracted millions of followers. For instance, Soka Gakkai, a form of Buddhism that focuses on the Lotus Sutra, was founded in 1930 and now claims around 12 million members worldwide. It is based on the teachings of 13th-

century Buddhist teacher Nichiren, who emphasized the practice of chanting the title of the Lotus Sutra, “*Namu myoho renge kyo.*”

- Falun Gong is a spiritual practice that draws on elements of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism, as well as physical movements that cultivate Qi. Falun Gong was founded in 1992 in China and by the end of the 1990s had tens of millions of practitioners. Tensions with the Chinese government resulted in Falun Gong being banned, and there has been a severe crackdown on practitioners.

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Dundas, *The Jains*.

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Long, *Jainism: An Introduction*.

Mann, Numrich, and Williams, *Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs in America*.

Matlins and Magida, *How to Be a Perfect Stranger*.

McLeod, *Sikhs and Sikhism*.

———, ed. and trans. *Textual Sources for the Study of Sikhism*.

Momen, *The Baha'i Faith*.

Van Vorst, *Anthology of World Scriptures*.

Questions to Consider

1. How does the Sikhs' relation to their sacred text, the Adi Granth, compare with Muslims' relation to the Qur'an, Jews' relation to the Torah, or Christians' relation to the New Testament?

2. Why do you think new religions like Baha'i, Soka Gakkai, and Falun Gong continue to emerge alongside older, more established religions? To what extent are these religions both old and new?

Religion and Law in America

Lecture 23

Many Americans have strong opinions about issues of religion and law, but only a small percentage knows exactly what the Constitution and the legal tradition say about religion. An important part of religious literacy for Americans involves understanding the Constitutional issues surrounding religion and also knowing the history of religion in America. The focus is on America here, but these issues also arise in other countries.

Religion among the Colonies

- Many Americans believe that the colonists came to America for the purpose of religious freedom. What we find when we look at the 13 original colonies is that most of them had established churches, meaning a formal, official relationship between religious and civil authority.
- Despite exceptions and the commitment to religious freedom by some prominent early Americans, establishment was the norm at the dawn of the 18th century. But if we look at the text of the Bill of Rights, we find a clear rejection of establishment.
- The entire Constitution has only one article (Article 6) dealing with religion at all; only 20 words of the article relate to religion—“no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United



The U.S. Constitution is conspicuous in its lack of references to God and religion.

States.” Clearly, the authors decided to keep matters of religion out of the business of government.

- This was made explicit in the First Amendment to the Constitution, where two clauses about religion were written. Here is the wording: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” The first clause is known as the establishment clause. The second is known as the free exercise clause.
- As the American colonies’ demographics shifted, there was a realization of the increasing difficulty of maintaining one established denomination. More and more colonists believed that if their group could not be guaranteed continued privileged status and dominance, then it would be best if no group held that position.

Deism

- Another element that was important in understanding why the founders rejected establishment is Deism. Deism is a form of religion that had its roots in the Enlightenment, which emphasized the authority of reason rather than the authority of tradition (whether religion or monarchy).
- Deists believe in God, but their conception of God is the God of Nature, a creator and architect of the cosmos. In general, they do not believe in a God who intervenes in daily affairs, or one with whom people have a personal relationship. Most Deists reject beliefs like the virgin birth, incarnation, trinity, resurrection, and the atonement theory of Christ’s crucifixion.
- Most of the most prominent founding fathers could be considered Deist, or at least strongly influenced by Deist beliefs. In fact, Thomas Jefferson created his own Bible by cutting out the passages that he rejected, which not only included miracle passages but also the letters of Paul.

- The founders were strongly opposed to coercion in matters of belief and practice, leading them to oppose the idea of an established church.

Separation of Church and State

- Does the prohibition of establishment mean that there should be a separation of church and state? Those who argue against separation point out that the words “separation of church and state” never occur in the Constitution. An argument on this side would be that the government can avoid establishing a state religion without having to keep religion and politics completely separate.
- Advocates of separation point out that, while the word “separation” does not occur in the Constitution, it was the intent of the framers.
- Advocates of separation point out the problems that can arise when the government promotes religion, and they worry about both government interference in religion and religious interference in government.
- The First Amendment clearly prohibits Congress from making any law establishing a religion, but a key question still remains—what counts as establishment? Does any kind of government support of religion constitute establishment? This debate about what the establishment clause permits and what it forbids has played out in the courts for many years.

The Establishment Clause in Action

- In the early 1960s, the State Board of Regents in New York wrote a prayer to be read by students in public schools. In 1962, The Supreme Court determined that requiring students to recite a prayer written by the state clearly violated the establishment clause, because the state was showing preference for a particular religious point of view and requiring participation in a religious practice.
- What if prayer is considered optional instead of required? Courts have generally found that pressure toward any kind of religious

participation, whether by state requirement or the softer coercion of the teacher's actions and peer pressure of classmates, is impermissible. The public school classroom, courts have agreed, is no place for organized prayer.

- None of this means that religion cannot be *taught* in the public school classroom. In addition, students can still pray individually and silently. These rulings only apply to organized prayer in the classroom.
- For the establishment clause, the Supreme Court developed a test that said a law or state action must meet three criteria: (1) It must have a secular purpose; (2) it must have a primary effect that neither advances nor hinders religion; (3) it must avoid “excessive entanglement” between religious and civil authority.

The Free Exercise Clause in Action

- How does the Court decide when to protect religious freedom and when it can be limited? In the 1870s, George Reynolds, a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, was convicted of bigamy. He argued that it was his religious right (in fact, obligation) to marry more than once.
- The Supreme Court held that the First Amendment protects religious beliefs, but one could not perform a religious action if that action is harmful to individuals or society, or in the words of the court, “subversive of good order.”
- As we move toward the 1940s, we find a growing presumption in favor of religious freedom and a high burden on the government to justify interference. A case that illustrates this is *Wisconsin v. Yoder* in 1972. In this case, Amish parents wanted the right to refuse compulsory education for their children beyond the eighth grade.
- The court ruled for the Amish, concluding that the religious freedom of the Amish would be unduly burdened by requiring high school attendance, given the inevitable exposure to worldly values their

children would face. Furthermore, the Amish community provided an alternative form of education, and their children would not be a burden on society.

- Everything changed with the landmark ruling, *Employment Division of Oregon v. Smith* in 1990, which raised a key question: Is the government obliged to allow exceptions to generally applicable laws for religious purposes, such as the exception made for sacramental wine during Prohibition?
- In this case, Al Smith, a member of the Klamath Tribe and the Native American Church, attended rituals in which peyote was consumed. For this, he was fired from his job and denied unemployment compensation.
- The case made it up to the Supreme Court, where the court dealt with the question of whether or not the free exercise clause protected the use of peyote despite the generally applicable law of prohibition against it. Peyote, which comes from a cactus harvested in special rituals, is an important sacrament to many Native American tribe members.
- The court majority, in an opinion written by Justice Antonin Scalia, ruled against the Native Americans, and in the opinion of many legal scholars, changed the nature of free exercise jurisprudence by stating that the Sherbert Test does not apply in the case of generally applicable laws. In other words, as long as the law is generally applicable and does not target a particular religion, the government does not have to prove any compelling interest if the act happens to burden someone's religious freedom.
- Justice Harry Blackmun wrote a powerful dissent to the majority opinion. Blackmun looked at the actual issue of Native American peyote use itself, asking the question, "Does government really have a compelling interest to ban this religious practice?"

- After the Court’s ruling, there was a major outcry. In response, Congress passed the Religious Freedom Restoration Act in 1993, which said that Government may burden a person’s exercise of religion only if it demonstrates that the burden “is in furtherance of a compelling governmental interest and is the least restrictive means of furthering that ... interest.”
- There is one more part of the story of the Smith case. In order to specifically protect Native American religious freedom, Congress passed amendments to the American Indian Religious Freedom Act in 1994 that permitted Native Americans to use peyote in religious rituals. But the reverberations of the ruling in the Smith case continue to be felt, because the burden is no longer on the government but on the religious practitioners.
- Let’s conclude with a final test case—*The Church of Lukumi Babalu Aye v. the City of Hialeah* in 1993. In this case, after a Santeria church, made up of primarily Cuban immigrants, announced plans to open a house of worship, the city of Hialeah, Florida, passed a law making it illegal for animals to be slaughtered if “not for the primary reason of food consumption.”
- Santeria is a syncretic religion originating in the Yoruba religion of West Africa and brought to the Caribbean with slaves. It involves priests and priestesses who interact with orishas, or spirits, and features animal sacrifice to the spirits as an important part of some rituals.
- The court ruled for the church. The law didn’t say that *no* animals could be slaughtered in the city. Rather, it specifically targeted the practice of slaughtering animals for the purposes of religious sacrifice. In the majority opinion, Justice Kennedy wrote, “The ordinances’ texts and operation demonstrate that they are not neutral, but have as their object the suppression of Santeria’s central element, animal sacrifice.” For this reason, the court ruled the ordinances unconstitutional.

Suggested Reading

Flowers, *That Godless Court?*

Holmes, *The Faiths of the Founding Fathers*.

Irons, *God on Trial: Landmark Cases from America's Religious Battlefields*.

Meacham, *American Gospel*.

Putnam, *American Grace*.

Questions to Consider

1. In what ways are church and state separate in America, and in what ways are they connected? What are the advantages and disadvantages of maintaining a separation?
2. When should exceptions be made in generally applicable laws for religious practices?
3. Look up and discuss a recent Supreme Court case dealing with religion. What clauses of the Constitution were involved? How did the Court rule? Do you agree with the ruling?

Religion Today—Trends, Challenges, and Hope

Lecture 24

We live in a rapidly changing, increasingly borderless world, and we must keep in mind that religious traditions are living things; they are always being shaped by dynamic cultural, national, and global forces. When we try to understand any religious tradition, we are trying to pin down a moving target. Knowledge of these trends will help us understand both current and future events.

Trends in Religion Today

- Female pastors and ministers, female rabbis, and female Zen masters, to name a few, have brought about transformations in their traditions. Feminist theologians have developed an approach to conceptions of God, texts, rituals, and structures of authority that attempts to eliminate patriarchal elements.
- Major demographic changes that have occurred in recent decades in America are increased diversity, growth in conservative Christianity, more fluid religious identity, and an increase in the religiously unaffiliated.
- With the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, non-European immigration increased dramatically. In addition, the cultural transformation of the 1960s led to religious teachers from many non-Western religions teaching and opening up temples and centers in America. Furthermore, the Muslim population has grown.
- Approximately 75 percent of Americans are Christian, but this percentage has been steadily declining. Within Christianity, there has been a notable rise in fundamentalist and evangelical Christian churches. Many Americans now see religious affiliation as a choice rather than a part of their identity.

- The number of Americans who consider themselves unaffiliated with any religious tradition doubled in the last decade. While people in this group do not feel that they belong to any tradition or religious institution, they still, for the most part, believe in God.

Thinking about Others—Exclusivism, Inclusivism, and Pluralism

- There are many different attitudes that members of one religious tradition can have toward members of other religious traditions. Three of the most well-known positions are exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. All of these positions are represented within virtually every religious tradition.
- Exclusivism is the position that one's own religion is the only true religion and that, therefore, it is the only religion that can provide salvation or liberation.
- We can see that this position can provide assurances to someone that their own tradition is right and can also motivate that person to go out and convert others. However, many people have been troubled by exclusivism. The problem is this: How can a just and loving God condemn to eternal hellfire billions of good people who just happen to be born into another religious tradition?
- Theologians who have trouble believing this is the case have developed alternatives to exclusivism. Two of these are inclusivism and pluralism.
- Inclusivism states that while one's own tradition is the only one that contains complete truth, salvation is still available to those who are outside of the tradition. The grace of God is extended to all human beings, and the saving work of grace can be accomplished even if the individual is not a member of their faith.
- This form of inclusivism allows Christians, for example, to maintain that salvation can only be understood within a Christian framework, but that it is available universally.

- Other theologians think that the step away from exclusivism is a good one, but that inclusivists do not go far enough. Pluralists reject the idea that any one religion has a monopoly on truth and salvation.
- We should recall that pluralism is a feature of religion in many parts of the world, and it has been quite common for people in China, Japan and India throughout history to either be connected with more than one tradition or to acknowledge that traditions other than their own are true.
- One form of pluralism holds that, despite the outward appearance of difference, at the deepest level, all religions are the same. Other pluralists deny the sameness of all religions and argue that if we truly want to respect and appreciate other traditions, we must maintain their distinctiveness and not try to blur the differences.
- The latter pluralist approach begins with the notion that ultimate reality—God, the divine—is beyond our ability to completely grasp. We must acknowledge that, as limited human beings, we can never understand divine reality in its entirety.
- In this form of pluralism, no religion possesses truth in its entirety. Each tradition possesses its powerful truths, but also its blind spots. The more religious traditions we welcome into the conversation, the more illumination there will be.
- In America, the general trend has been away from exclusivism and towards inclusivism and pluralism. According to a recent survey, nearly 90 percent of Americans believe that it is possible for people not of their faith to go to heaven. This is a remarkable change from surveys taken in the early 20th century.
- What has led to this change? One explanation is that Americans have members of their families and circle of friends who are from religious traditions different than their own. There is not only a growing number of multifaith families but also an increase in the

number of multifaith individuals, people who feel a connection to more than one tradition.

- It is worth stepping back and reflecting on the coexistence of the two very different trends—On the one hand, an increase in conservative Christian denominations that have foundations strongly grounded in a literal reading of the Bible and a set of moral absolutes; on the other hand, an increase in unaffiliated people, multifaith families and individuals, greater religious fluidity, and pluralism.
- Perhaps we can see these two trends as opposing responses to the same phenomena—the rapid pace of change brought about by globalization, a sense of instability, and increased diversity.

Violence and Religion

- Given the tensions among and within religions, how do we address the ever-present possibility of religious violence? What is the link between religion and violence? Does religion cause violence?
- No simple statement such as “religion does (or does not) cause violence” can be made. Certain kinds of religion plus political/economic/cultural factors plus social/organizational factors equals (when combined can lead to) increased probability of violence. Our analysis can proceed from this equation.



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The Role of Religion

- Differences within religions are as great, if not greater than, the differences among them. On every major issue you can imagine, there is a wide range

“Religious” warfare, such as that between Israel and Palestine, often has as much to do with economics and politics as faith.

of views and interpretations. There will often be more agreement about important issues going across different traditions on the same position of the continuum than going along the continuum within one religious tradition.

- We need not see religion in general, or even a particular religion, as a cause of violence. Rather, the problem is certain forms of religion can be found in almost every tradition. Religion can inspire the most noble, compassionate actions, but it can also lead to the most destructive, violent actions because it makes ultimate claims.
- Danger comes when people give absolute, uncritical obedience and commitment to a religious text, doctrine, leader, or institution. Other factors that are often associated with religious extremism and violence are zealous puritanism, dualistic thinking (dividing the world into us-them), next-worldly focus, and an emphasis on martyrdom.
- Absolute certainty, zealous puritanism, good/evil dualism, and martyrdom can be appealing because they radically simplify the world and provide a sense of purpose, empowerment, and belonging to someone who might feel disempowered, hopeless, and lost.
- The religious orientation we just described is more likely to give rise to violent movements in particular contexts, environments that lack opportunities for legitimate political expression, leading those who are disenfranchised to look for other methods of influence. Other factors include ethnic conflicts, disputes over land, poverty and unemployment, and a cultural environment that glorifies violence and martyrdom. In addition, there are psychological factors, such as a sense of alienation, humiliation, hopelessness, and rage, which can be found at both individual and group levels.
- Such conditions make people vulnerable to recruitment. Very few terrorists act completely alone. Most terrorists, at least to some degree, were recruited by someone; they received support and training. Many extremist organizations have charismatic leaders

who are able to find and recruit vulnerable people, a process that has become easier in the Internet age.

Final Ideas

- The main purpose of seeking to understand all of these sources of religious extremism and violence is so that we can prevent it in the future. If all three of these categories—religious worldview, the political/economic environment, and the recruiting organization—can be factors in explaining religious violence, they can also play a role in reducing religious violence.
- Religious transformation can mean embracing a new form of the tradition, one that is nonviolent, one that combines faith and critical inquiry, one that favors dialogue with other traditions rather than bigotry.
- Surveys show that having friends and neighbors of different religions leads to increasing pluralism and tolerance. This is important not just in America, but everywhere.
- Studies show that nations with large numbers of young, single, unemployed men face increased risks of instability and violence. Assisting vulnerable young people through job training and career counseling can help move them away from extremist organizations to more productive, nonviolent pursuits.
- All of these religious and political factors that we have discussed usually do not lead people to militancy unless they become part of an organization. Moderate organizations that stand for nonviolence and dialogue must target the vulnerable young people that the extremist groups are going after.
- We have seen that one of the greatest sources of peace, and one of the greatest sources of conflict among people, is religion. Religion becomes dangerous when it focuses on the drawing and defending of boundaries. This is the realm of “us and them,” from which

comes division and strife. Religion at its best is about the dissolving of boundaries and the experience of connection.

- Given what you now know about religion, you can play a role in addressing the problem of ignorance about other religions and in combating intolerance and stereotypes.
- To bring about peace, we must stand alongside our neighbors from other religious traditions, cultures, and backgrounds, ready to engage in dialogue about the things that matter most to us. By cultivating our religious literacy, we better understand our neighbors, our world, and the events of our time.

Suggested Reading

Christ and Plaskow, *Womanspirit Rising*.

———, *A New Religious America*.

Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*.

Knitter, *The Myth of Religious Superiority*.

Patel, *Acts of Faith*.

Prebish and Tanaka, *The Faces of Buddhism in America*.

Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*.

Stern, *Terror in the Name of God*.

Tippett, *Speaking of Faith*.

Wuthnow, *After Heaven*.

———, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity*.

Questions to Consider

1. Do you think it is possible to be spiritual without being religious? What do those terms mean to you?

2. Of the 10 people closest to you, how many are of a religion different from yours? Ask them to tell you something that is important to them about their religion. Be prepared to respond to the same question about your own religion.

3. What do you think of pluralism, the belief that truth can be found in multiple religious traditions?

Timeline

Note: Numbers in square brackets indicate relevant lectures.

Hinduism



- c. 3000–1300 B.C.E. Indus Valley Civilization. [3]
- c. 1700 B.C.E. Aryan Migration to India. [3]
- c. 1500–500 B.C.E. Vedic Period; composition of the Rig Veda and other Vedas. [3]
- 6th century B.C.E. Upanishads. [3, 4]
- 200 B.C.E.–200 C.E. Composition of the Bhagavad Gita. [5]
- c. 200 C.E. Patanjali's Yoga Sutra. [5]
- 788–820 C.E. Life of Shankara (Advaita Vedanta). [5]
- 1830s C.E. Beginning of Hindu Renaissance. [5]
- 1869–1948 C.E. Life of Mahatma Gandhi. [5]
- 1966 C.E. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabupada founds ISKCON (Hare Krishnas). [5]

Jainism



595–527 B.C.E..... Life of Mahavira, founder
of Jainism. [22]

Buddhism



5th–6th centuries B.C.E..... Life of Siddhartha Gautama,
the Buddha. [6]

29 B.C.E..... Writing of Pali Canon in Sri
Lanka (Theravada). [6, 7]

1st century C.E..... Beginning of Mahayana Buddhism. [7]

1st century C.E..... Buddhism enters China. [12]

5th–6th century C.E..... Bodhidharma brings Chan
(Zen) to China. [12]

- 6th century C.E. Buddhism enters Japan. [12]
- 7th–8th centuries C.E. Buddhism enters Tibet. [7]
- 12th–13th centuries C.E. Development of Zen, Pure Land, and Nichiren Buddhism in Japan. [12]
- 1930 C.E. Founding of Soka Gakkai in Japan. [12]
- 1959 C.E. Dalai Lama flees Tibet and begins exile in India. [7]

Chinese Religions

- c. 14th–11th century B.C.E. Shang Dynasty oracle bone divination. [8]
- 551–479 B.C.E. Life of Confucius. [9]
- 300 B.C.E. Daode Jing composed. [10]
- 4th–3rd century B.C.E. Life of Zhuangzi. [10]
- 2nd century C.E. Beginning of Celestial Masters Daoism. [10]
- 1992 C.E. Founding of Falun Gong. [22]

Shinto



- 8th century C.E. Kojiki and Nihon Shoki composed. [11]
- 1868 C.E. Beginning of State Shinto. [11]
- 1945–1946 C.E. End of State Shinto; Emperor Hirohito renounces divinity. [11]

Judaism



- 1800 B.C.E. Abraham goes to Canaan. [13]
- 1250 B.C.E. Moses leads Exodus of Jews from Egypt. [13]
- c. 1020–930 B.C.E. Kingdom of Israel (Saul, David, and Solomon). [14]
- 950 B.C.E. Completion of First Temple in Jerusalem by Solomon. [14]

10 th –2 nd century B.C.E.....	Jewish biblical canon written. [13]
586–538 B.C.E.....	Destruction of First Temple; Babylonian exile. [14]
c. 5 th century B.C.E.....	Torah takes its final form under Ezra the Scribe. [13]
168–164 B.C.E.....	Maccabean Revolt against Syria. [14]
66 C.E.	Great Jewish Revolt against Rome. [14]
70 C.E.	Destruction of the Second Temple. [14]
5 th –6 th century C.E.....	Completion of Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmud. [13, 14]
1135–1204 C.E.....	Life of Maimonides. [14]
13 th century C.E.....	Jews expelled from England and France. [14]
1492 C.E.	Expulsion of Muslims and Jews from Spain. [14]
1700–1760 C.E.	Life of Baal Shem Tov; founding of Chasidic Judaism. [14]
19 th century C.E.....	Reform and Conservative Judaism founded. [14]
1939–1945 C.E.	Holocaust. [14]
1947 C.E.	Discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. [14]
1948 C.E.	Modern State of Israel founded. [14]

Christianity



- c. 4 B.C.E.–30 C.E. Life of Jesus. [16]
- 4–64 C.E. Life of Paul. [17]
- 70–95 C.E. Gospels written down. [16, 17]
- 313 C.E. Roman emperor Constantine gives religious freedom to Christians. [17]
- 325 C.E. Council of Nicaea establishes Christian orthodox belief. [17]
- 354–430 C.E. Life of Augustine. [17]
- 380 C.E. Christianity made the official religion of the Roman Empire. [17]
- 6th century C.E. Benedictine Order founded on *Rule of St. Benedict*. [17]
- 1054 C.E. Schism between Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. [17]
- 13th century C.E. Dominican and Franciscan orders established. [17]
- 13th century C.E. Life of Thomas Aquinas. [17]

14 th century C.E.....	Life of Julian of Norwich. [17]
16 th century C.E.....	Ignatius of Loyola founds the Society of Jesus (Jesuits). [17]
1517 C.E.	Martin Luther posts his 95 Theses at Wittenberg; beginning of the Protestant Reformation. [18]
1534 C.E.	Luther’s translation of the Bible; King Henry VIII founds the Church of England. [18]
16 th century C.E.....	Radical Reformation (Baptists, Amish, Mennonites). [18]
17 th century C.E.....	Society of Friends (Quakers). [18]
18 th century C.E.....	Methodism started under John Wesley. [18]
1830s C.E.....	Joseph Smith founds Mormonism. [18]
1844 C.E.	Brigham Young leads the Mormons to Utah. [18]
1870 C.E.	First Vatican Council establishes papal infallibility. [17]
1910 C.E.	Publication of <i>The Fundamentals</i> (articulation of Christian fundamentalism). [18]
1962–1965 C.E.	Second Vatican Council allows use of vernacular languages in Mass. [17]

1971 C.E. Gustavo Gutierrez's *A Theology of Liberation* is published. [17]

Islam



- 570–632 C.E. Life of Muhammad. [19]
- 610 C.E. First revelation of the Qur'an. [19]
- 622 C.E. Muhammad emigration to Medina (the Hijra); year 1 of the Islamic calendar. [19]
- 630 C.E. Muhammad's triumphant return to Mecca. [19]
- 656 C.E. Ali becomes the fourth Caliph. [21]
- 661 C.E. Ali is assassinated. [21]
- 680 C.E. Husayn is killed at the Battle of Karbala. [21]
- 9th–13th century C.E. House of Wisdom in Baghdad. [19]
- 1207–1273 C.E. Life of Jalal ad-Din Rumi. [21]
- 18th century C.E. Wahhabi movement is founded. [21]

- 19th century C.E..... Beginning of Islamic Modernism. [21]
- 1928 C.E. The Muslim Brotherhood is formed. [21]
- 1930 C.E. Founding of Nation of Islam. [21]
- 1979 C.E. Iranian Revolution; ascendance of Ayatollah Khomeini. [21]
- 1987 C.E. Hamas is founded. [21]

Sikhism



- 1469–1539 C.E. Life of Guru Nanak, founder of Sikhism. [22]
- 1604 C.E. Completion of the Golden Temple and Adi Granth. [22]
- 1666–1708 C.E. Life of Guru Gobind Singh, the final human guru. [22]
- 1699 C.E. Founding of Khalsa. [22]
- 1984 C.E. Attack on the Golden Temple at Amritsar. [22]

The Baha'i Faith



- 1819–1850 C.E. Life of the Bab. [22]
- 1817–1892 C.E. Life of Baha'u'llah, founder
of Baha'i Faith. [22]

Religion in America

- 1789 C.E. Article 6 of the Constitution prohibits
religious test for public office. [23]
- 1791 C.E. Adoption of First Amendment
establishment clause and free
exercise clause. [23]
- 1893 C.E. World Parliament of Religions
in Chicago. [24]
- 1962 C.E. *Engel v. Vitale* prohibits
school prayer. [23]
- 1963 C.E. Sherbert Test requires compelling
interest and least restrictive means. [23]
- 1972 C.E. *Wisconsin v. Yoder* allows Amish
homeschooling after eighth grade. [23]
- 1990 C.E. *Oregon v. Smith* allows states to
prohibit religious peyote use. [23]

- 1993 C.E. Religious Freedom Restoration Act. [23]
- 2001 C.E. 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon by Al Qaeda. [24]

Bibliography

Note: In addition to the individual titles listed below, I recommend two series that contain a variety of useful texts.

Oxford University Press's Very Short Introduction Series comprises more than 40 concise, clearly written introductions to religious traditions, figures, and scriptures for the general reader. The series features introductions to Buddhism, Christianity (including separate titles focusing on Catholicism, Protestantism, Mormonism, Pentecostalism, etc.), Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Sikhism; books on figures such as Jesus, Muhammad, Paul, Augustine, and Aquinas; and texts such as the Bible, the Koran and the Book of Mormon.

The edited volumes in the Princeton Readings in Religions Series, which make available many previously untranslated religious texts, feature contributions from scholars who introduce the texts and discuss the context and influence of the works. The series focuses on lived religions, i.e., historical and contemporary religious practices. These books are for readers who want to go beyond introductions to deeper studies of the world's religions. The titles include *Asian Religions in Practice*, *Buddhism in Practice*, *Islam in South Asia in Practice*, *Judaism in Practice*, *Religions of China in Practice*, *Religions of India in Practice*, *Religions of Japan in Practice*, *Religions of Korea in Practice*, *Religions of the United States in Practice*, and others.

Abdo, Geneive. *Mecca and Main Street: Muslim Life in America after 9/11*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. A thoughtful examination of the lives of Muslims in contemporary America.

Abou El Fadl, Khaled. *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists*. New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005. Both an analysis of the divisions within Islam today and also a call for opposing militancy and strengthening moderation in Islam from an influential contemporary Muslim scholar.

Al-Qur'an: A Contemporary Translation, translated by Ahmed Ali. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001. A translation of the Qur'an

into clear, poetic English. The translator—a Pakistani poet, novelist, scholar, and diplomat—also provides helpful notes on terms and passages.

Armstrong, Karen. *The Battle for God*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2001. A balanced, clearly written analysis of the historical origins, characteristics and impact of fundamentalism in the modern age.

———, *Buddha*. New York: Penguin, 2004. A well-written biography of the central figure of Buddhism.

———, *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992. An accessible biography of Muhammad.

Atwood, Craig. *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010. A helpful resource that provides an introductory overview of the major forms and denominations of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in America.

Augustine. *Confessions*, translated by Henry Chadwick. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. A readable translation of perhaps the first autobiography in the West, written by one of the most important Christian theologians in history.

Babb, Lawrence A. *The Divine Hierarchy: Popular Hinduism in Central India*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1975. An overview of many aspects of popular Hinduism in India, including discussions of rituals, deities, and festivals.

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Bercholz, Samuel, and Sherab Chödzin. *Entering the Stream: An Introduction to the Buddha and His Teachings*. Boston: Shambhala, 1993. A collection of essays by Buddhist scholars and masters covering a range of key topics (such as meditation and karma) and all major forms of Buddhism.

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Boff, Leonardo, and Clodovis Boff. *Introducing Liberation Theology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987. A very succinct, accessible introduction to Christian liberation theology.

Borg, Marcus J. *Jesus, a New Vision: Spirit, Culture, and the Life of Discipleship*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991. A book that draws on modern scholarship of the historical Jesus to convey not only what Jesus meant in his own time, but what he can mean in ours as well.

Cahill, Thomas. *The Gifts of the Jews: How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels*. New York: Nan A. Talese, 1999. A thought-provoking discussion of the contributions that Jews (and Jewish culture and religion) have made to the world.

Chapple, Christopher Key. *Jainism and Ecology: Nonviolence in the Web of Life*. Cambridge, MA: Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard Divinity School, 2002. A collection of essays that reflect on the connections of Jainism with modern environmentalism. There are a number of other volumes in this series, all of which look at the ways that religious traditions can contribute to, and might be in tension with, environmentalism, including *Buddhism and Ecology*, *Daoism and Ecology*, *Hinduism and Ecology*, *Judaism and Ecology*, and *Christianity and Ecology*.

Ching, Julia. *Chinese Religions*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993. A readable introduction to the major religious traditions of China, encompassing philosophical texts as well as popular practices, from the ancient to the modern period.

Christ, Carol P., and Judith Plaskow. *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992. A classic collection of feminist reflections on religion, including discussions of reconstructing traditional religions (primarily Judaism and Christianity) and creations of new traditions (including those that draw on ancient goddess religions).

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Confucius. *The Analects*, translated by D. C. Lau. New York: Penguin Classics, 1979. A reliable translation with helpful appendices on Confucius's life and disciples.

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Dorff, Elliot N., and Louis E. Newman. *Contemporary Jewish Theology: A Reader*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. A set of essays from the most important voices in modern Jewish thought on a wide range of topics, from God and law to the Holocaust and Israel.

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———, *Religion in the Japanese Experience: Sources and Interpretations*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1997. A collection of primary texts from the major Japanese religions along with introductory notes and analysis.

Eck, Diana L. *Darsán: Seeing the Divine Image in India*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998. A thoughtful analysis of the importance of the visual connection between worshipper and deity in Hinduism; it serves as a helpful introduction to devotion and ritual in the Hindu tradition.

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