

# Exploring Religion

## Religion and the Body



RELG 101 - 002  
Spring 2020  
TR 11:40am-12:55pm  
Close-Hipp 436

Professor Daniel M. Stuart  
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This course introduces students to the study of religion through a consideration of the relationship between religion and the human body. Religion is often framed as involving matters of soul and spirit, in contrast with the physical body. Yet, the body turns out to be deeply implicated in religious practice, thought, and symbolism. We will focus on representations and uses of the human body in three religious traditions: Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity. Topics to be considered include sexuality and celibacy, ascetic practice, ritual, food, relics, and meditation. Our sources raise difficult and complex questions: Is the human body to be understood as a “temple” to be cared for and kept pure, or as a trapping to be renounced and rejected? Is it a vehicle or a hindrance for spiritual progress? How are physical properties and moral excellence connected? How does gender affect one’s spiritual state? What is the brain’s role in religion?

This course satisfies the GSS requirement in the Carolina Core.

## Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students should be able to:

- Describe some of the main tenets and practices of the religious traditions discussed in the class.
- Discuss the ways in which human behavior is shaped by beliefs in a divine being or beings, spirits, ancestors, or other non-empirical agents.
- Demonstrate an understanding of some of the various methods scholars apply to the analysis of religion.
- Read religious texts critically, and analyze and compare specific examples of religious discourse.
- Analyze and compare specific examples of religious social formation.
- Articulate their own views effectively in discussion and writing about the religious traditions covered in class and about the academic study of religion.

## Required Readings

Kim Knott, *Hinduism: A Very Short Introduction*

Damien Keown, *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction*

Linda Woodhead, *Christianity: A Very Short Introduction*

All other readings are accessible as e-readings on Blackboard.

## Course Requirements

1. *Attendance and participation* (15% of the final grade)  
You are expected to come to class well-prepared, i.e. having done the reading assignments thoughtfully and being prepared to engage in discussion about them. Participation, including class discussion and other in-class activities, is an essential part of your learning in this class. If you feel shy about speaking up in class, or face any other issues, please come and talk to me.  
Note: Class absences will affect your participation grade (see Course Policies).
2. *Quizzes* (20%) – four in the course of the semester (2/4; 2/27; 3/31; 4/16)
3. *Mid-term exam* (30%)  
The mid-term will be administered in class on Thursday, March 5 and will be based on prior lectures and readings.
4. *Final take-home exam* (35%)  
This is an essay examination and will take place on Thursday, April 30, at 12:30 p.m.

*Grading Scale*: 100-90 A; 89-87 B+; 86-80 B; 79-77 C+; 76-70 C; 69-67 D+; 66-60 D; 59 and below F

## **Course Policies**

### **Academic Integrity**

The University of South Carolina has clearly articulated its policies governing academic integrity and students are encouraged to carefully review the policy on the Honor Code in the Carolina Community. Any deviation from these expectations will result in academic penalties as well as disciplinary action. The area of greatest potential risk for inadvertent academic dishonesty is plagiarism. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, paraphrasing or direct quotation of the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgement.

### **Attendance**

Prompt and regular attendance is crucial for success in this course. Attendance will be taken at the start of each class. We will follow the university's policy regarding attendance and the effect of unexcused absences on a student's course grade. If you are absent for an excusable reason – such as a medical reason or a family emergency – it is your responsibility to submit the needed documentation (e.g. a doctor's note) to the instructor. The University attendance policy specifies that students may miss up to 3 class meetings (10% of class time) without penalty. The 4th absence will result in a grade penalty of one letter grade for your class participation grade. The 5th absence will result in a deduction of 2 letter grades; and so on.

### **Classroom Conduct**

All cell phones are to be turned off or silenced during class; there is no text messaging, web browsing, etc, during class. Please come to class on time, and be respectful of everyone else in the class. Refrain from personal attacks or demeaning comments of any kind. Disrespectful or disruptive behavior, such as talking out of turn, may result in dismissal from class and/or an academic penalty.

### **Midterm Exam**

Makeup exams will be allowed only with pre-approval of the instructor or with an acceptable, documented reason. Acceptable reasons for makeup exams include severe illness, family emergencies or other unavoidable events including dangerous weather conditions and car accidents. Exam format for makeup exams may be different than the original exam and will likely utilize a short answer format. An oral examination may also be utilized if deemed appropriate by the instructor.

### **Final Exam**

Students who are absent from any final examination will be given the grade of F on the course if they have not offered an excuse acceptable to the instructor. Re-examinations for the purpose of removing an F or raising a grade are not permitted. If the absence is excused, students will be assigned a grade of I, and may complete the course under the conditions specified by the instructor in the "Assignment of Incomplete Grade" form. A student with excused absence from a final examination in one semester may take the deferred examination at the next regular examination period provided the examination is taken at the convenience of the professor. The examination must be taken within one calendar year from the time the absence was incurred. Deferred examinations will be granted only in case of absence certified as unavoidable because of documented illness or other cause, rendering attendance at final examinations impossible.

### **Accommodating Disabilities**

Reasonable accommodations are available for students with a documented disability. If you have a disability and may need accommodations to fully participate in this class, contact the Office of Student Disability Services: 777-6142, TDD 777-6744, email [sasds@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:sasds@mailbox.sc.edu), or stop by LeConte College Room 112A. All accommodations must be approved through the Office of Student Disability Services.

## Course Schedule

### Week 1: Approaching Religion

- 1/14 (T) Introduction to the Course
- 1/16 (R) What do we mean when we talk about religion?
- J. Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," pp. 269-284

### Week 2: Approaching Religious Studies and Christianity

- 1/21 (T) How to study religion? Introducing Religious Studies
- Carl Olson, "Religion and Religious Studies: An Introduction," pp. 1-17
- 1/23 (R) Approaching the Body – and Christianity – Academically
- Linda Woodhead, *Christianity: A Very Short Introduction*, Ch. 1-2

### Week 3: The Body in the Christian Tradition

- 1/28 (T) Roots of the Judeo-Christian View of the Body
- Silvia Schroer and Thomas Staubli, *Body Symbolism in the Bible*, pp. 22-39
- 1/230 (R) Early Christian Martyrdom
- Linda Woodhead, *Christianity: A Very Short Introduction*, Ch. 7
  - "The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas," in *The acts of the Christian martyrs*, trans. by Herbert Musurillo

#### Recommended background reading:

- Margaret R. Miles, "Becoming Male': Female Martyrs and Ascetics"

### Week 4: Martyrdom and Asceticism in Early Christianity

- 2/4 (T) The Disciplined Body as the Locus of Divine Power
- "The Life of Symeon Stylites" by Theodoret
  - QUIZ #1
- 2/6 (R) NO CLASS: The professor will be out of town for a conference

## Week 5: The Body in the Christian Middle Ages

2/11 (T) Medieval Christian Cult of Relics

- Linda Woodhead, *Christianity: A Very Short Introduction*, Ch. 3
- Patrick Geary, “The Cult of Relics in Carolingian Europe”

2/13 (R) Gender and the Body in Medieval Christianity

- Linda Woodhead, *Christianity: A Very Short Introduction*, Ch. 4
- Caroline Walker Bynum, “The Female Body and Religious Practice in the Later Middle Ages” in *Fragmentation and Redemption*, p. 181-238

## Week 6: Hindu Traditions: Myth, Body, and Cosmos

2/18 (T) Body as Cosmos: Hindu Creation Myths

- Knott, Ch. 1, 2
- *The Rig Veda*, trans. Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty (selections)

2/20 (R) Ātman as Different from the Body

- Knott, Ch. 3
- *Upaniṣads*, trans. Patrick Olivelle
  - Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 3
  - teaching of Uddālaka Aruṇi to his son Śvetaketu (Chāndogya Upaniṣad 6.1-16)
  - Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad (entire)

## Week 7: Human and Divine Bodies

2/25 (T) A Hindu Book of Manners from c. 200 CE

- *Manu’s Code of Law*, trans. Patrick Olivelle (selections)

2/27 (R) The Gods and Goddesses of Classical Hinduism

- Knott, Ch. 4-5
- QUIZ #2

## Week 8: Contemporary Hinduism

3/3 (T) Hinduism in the Modern World

- Knott, Ch. 6-8

3/5 (R) \*\* Mid-Term Exam \*\*

## SPRING BREAK (3/8–3/15)

### Week 9: The Body as a Vehicle for Spiritual Liberation in Hinduism

- 3/17 (T) Yoga
- Gavin Flood, *Introduction to Hinduism*, pp. 93-102
  - Barbara Stoler Miller (trans.), *Yoga: Discipline of Freedom*, pp. 29-43
- 3/19 (R) The Tantric Tradition
- David Gordon White, “Tantra in Practice: Mapping a Tradition”; focus on pages 7-18
  - Douglas Renfrew Brooks, “Ocean of the Heart: Selections from the *Kulārṇava Tantra*,” 347-60

### Week 10: Introducing Buddhism

- 3/24 (T) The Buddha
- Keown Ch. 1-2
- 3/26 (R) The Buddha’s Teachings: The Four Noble Truths
- Keown Ch. 3-4

### Week 11: Control and Observance of the Body in Buddhist Monasticism

- 3/31 (T) How to Be a Good Buddhist Monk or Nun
- Keown Ch. 8
  - Steven Collins, “The Body in Theravāda Buddhist Monasticism,” pp. 185-192
  - browse the Buddhist monastic rules (the Vinaya) online:
    - <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/vin/sv/bhikkhu-pati.html> (Monks’ rules)
    - <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/vin/sv/bhikkhuni-pati.html> (Nuns’ rules)
  - QUIZ #3
- 4/2 (R) Buddhist Body-Centered Meditation
- Keown Ch. 7
  - Steven Collins, “The Body in Theravāda Buddhist Monasticism,” pp. 192-204

## Week 12: The Buddhist Body as a Site for Cultivating Virtue

4/7 (T) Embodied Ethics

- Susanne Mrozik: “The Value of Human Differences: South Asian Buddhist Contributions Toward an Embodied Virtue Theory”

4/9 (R) Mahāyāna Buddhism

- Keown, Ch. 5-6

## Week 13: Gender and Enlightenment

4/14 (T) Awakening Moments: Poems by Early Buddhist Nuns

- Susan Murcott, *The First Buddhist Women*, pp. 32-48, 62-73, 84-90, 129-34, 177-183

4/16 (R) Gender-bending Enlightenment

- Diana Paul, “Bodhisattvas with Sexual Transformation,” in *Women in Buddhism*, pp. 166-179, 185-197
- QUIZ #4

## Week 14: Locating Religion in the Brain

4/21 (T) Neurotheology

- Eugene d’Aquili and Andrew Newberg, “The Neuropsychological Basis of Religions, or Why God Won’t Go Away”
- Massimo Pigliucci, “Neuro-theology, a Rather Skeptical Perspective”

4/23 (R) Brain research on Buddhist meditators

- Adeline van Waning, “Inside the Shamatha Project,” pp. 39-45
- Manish Sagar et al., “Intensive training induces longitudinal changes in meditation state-related EEG oscillatory activity,” pp. 1-14

## Week 15: Wrapping Up

4/28 (T) Final reflections and exam review

**FINAL TAKE-HOME EXAM: Due on April 30 at 2:30 pm**