



RE 103-003: RELIGION AND CULTURE

FALL 2009

Prof. Olga Solovieva

Tu Th 9:10-11:00 a.m., Tisch 201

Office hours: Tu 3-4 p.m., Th 2-3 p.m. and by appt. Ladd 215

Phone: 580-8409

E-mail: osolovie@skidmore.edu

"Religion [means] orientation--orientation in the ultimate sense, that is, how one comes to terms with the ultimate significance of one's place in the world. . . . The religion of any people is more than a structure of thought; it is experience, expression, motivations, intentions, behaviors, styles, and rhythms."

Charles H. Long, *Significations*

Religion is the quest, within the bounds of the human, historical condition, for the power to manipulate and negotiate one's 'situation' so as to have 'space' in which meaningfully to dwell. It is the power to relate one's domain to the plurality of environmental and social spheres in such a way as to guarantee the conviction that one's existence 'matters.' Religion is a distinctive mode of human creativity, a creativity which both discovers limits and creates limits for human existence.

J.Z.Smith, *Map is Not Territory*

Course Description:

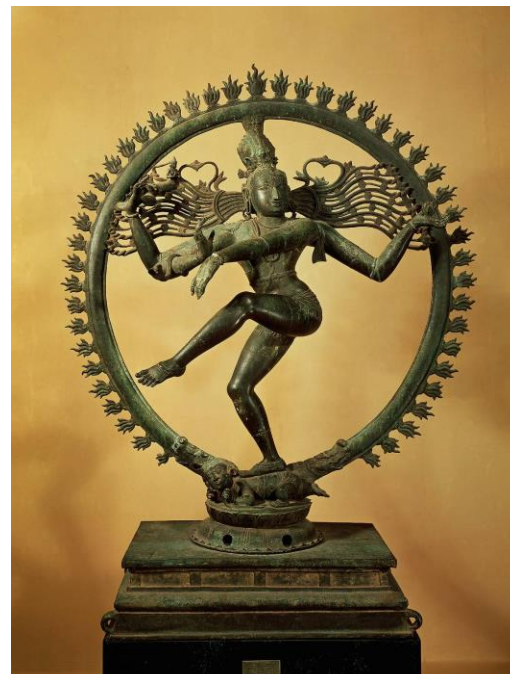
This course introduces students to the study of religion as an important dimension of human experience and culture. By looking at a variety of cultural media (texts, film, ritual, visual art), we will explore how religious imagination operates within particular cultural contexts as to formulate, and practically engage with, the ultimate questions of human existence. Our topics will include the nature and characteristics of religious language; the possibilities and limitations of visual images in conveying the ultimate realities and meanings; cultural imaginations and experiences of space, land and sacred landscape; and the notions of the self, human body, gender, and personal transformation as articulated in religious practice and thought across cultures and times.

Required Texts

James Livingston, Anatomy of the Sacred (6th ed.)

Diana Eck, Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India
Course Reader (= "CR" on syllabus)

Books are available for purchase at the Skidmore Bookstore; they are also placed on a 3-hour reserve at the library. Other readings will be available on-line and as a Course Reader (to get a copy stop by Philosophy and Religion main office in Ladd; Part I is available now, Part II will be available later in the semester). In addition, there will be occasional handouts distributed in class; please note that it is your responsibility to obtain and keep the copies of all handouts throughout the semester. There will also be a number of videos screened in class; should you miss any screenings, please make sure you arrange to watch that video as soon as possible.



Requirements

1. Participation	10 points
2. Tests (2 x 20)	40 points
3. Reading Journal (Reflection Papers)	30 points
4. Religious Visitation Project	20 points

Grading Scale

This course will be graded on the following scale (point values approximate, subject to adjustment at the instructor's discretion):

100-94 = A	75-72 = C
93-91 = A-	71-69 = C-
90-87 = B+	68-66 = D+
86-82 = B	65-62 = D
81-80 = B-	61-59 = D-
79-76 = C+	below = F

A: Active and in-depth involvement with the material as demonstrated in class discussions and written and oral assignments; outstanding quality of writing and ability to analyze and appreciate difficult concepts and ideas.

B: Above-average performance on written assignments and tests; demonstrates consistent and thoughtful engagement with the material.

C: Adequate performance on tests; consistent attendance and on-time completion of reading log entries.

Class participation

- (a) Your participation is vital to the success of our course, so please take this requirement seriously! Certain times in class each week will be reserved for discussion, usually centering around the close reading of the assigned texts and your responses to them. Please bring your copies of the assigned readings to class and be prepared to talk about them.
- (b) Your participation is assessed based on your presence and preparation, so that an active and well-prepared participation in class discussions will raise your participation grade (5 points/C+ by default), while no-shows or evident negligence in reading will lower it.
- (c) Attendance is required and will be recorded beginning the second week of the semester. Each student is allowed 2 unexcused absences; please plan your time accordingly. Each additional absence will lower your participation grade by 1 point, unless it is a documented emergency (acceptable documents include: a note from your doctor or health services for medical emergencies; a letter from appropriate departments, offices or faculty for athletic and academic events; a note from the Dean of Students office and/or parents in case of family emergencies).
- (d) Please note that consistent failure to attend classes (over 6 missed classes) will result in a failing grade and/or removal from the course, at instructor's discretion (and I'm not joking!)

In-Class Tests

- (a) Two in-class tests will be administered in the course of the semester, on the dates specified in the Schedule of Readings. Each test is worth 20 points of your final grade.

- (b) Tests are non-cumulative; they will be designed to cover material presented both in readings and in class (lectures, discussions and videos), so it is to your advantage to familiarize yourself with all the material covered in appropriate section of the course. Study guides will be posted on-line at least 48 hours before the tests; when time allows, there will be brief in-class review sessions conducted before each test, or else we will do it on-line, using Blackboard “discussion” feature. You are encouraged to prepare for the tests by reviewing terms and concepts identified in these guides, and by reflecting on the questions presented. Please note that no make-up tests will be given except for legitimate reasons and with prior arrangement.

Reading Journal / Reflection Papers

- (a) These reading/writing assignments are designed to help you engage with the course readings in an in-depth and creative way. You are asked to identify important themes and key concepts introduced in the readings, and also—very important!—to engage with them in a critical (i.e., serious/scholarly) yet imaginative way, by offering your own interpretations and reflections. In some of these papers, you will need to respond to specific questions that I will distribute ahead of time; in others, you will be free to choose your own issues and questions, including but not limited to: What are the central concepts/figures/themes introduced in the reading? What images, descriptions, or characterizations of deities/humans/rituals/places strike you in the text, and why? How are they significant for understanding the ways of being religious? How do the issues and themes presented in the reading relate to your own experience, academic and/or existential? What questions do you have, or would have liked to ask—whether of your instructor, the text’s author and characters, or yourself?
- (b) You must submit your Reading Journal Entries (a.k.a. Reflection Papers) on the dates noted on the syllabus. There are 17 possible entries; you must do 12 of them; otherwise, you will lose credit for the entire assignment (this means that if you complete only 11 of these papers, you will get 0 pts—and I’m totally serious about that!) No late entries will be accepted for any reason other than documented medical emergencies—please organize your time accordingly. Bring your papers to class with you and be prepared to refer to them during class discussions; occasionally, I might ask one or more of you to read your papers to the class in order to facilitate our discussion—don’t be shy!, and be ready to defend and discuss the perspective you’ve chosen to argue for. I will collect papers after the class and return them to you once they are graded. Get yourself a nice folder and keep your graded entries together—this will help you prepare for your tests, as well as help us resolve any potential problems with your grade for this assignment at the end of the semester.
- (c) Your papers must be 3-5 paragraphs (1-2 pages in length), typed, double-spaced, standard font. If you write more than 2 pages, I’ll forgive you (as long as you keep it under, well, let’s say, 5 pages); but if you write less than 1 page, beware! Each paper must deal with the readings specified in the appropriate sections of the Schedule of Readings. Completed entries will be graded on a pass/fail basis: 1 = does not meet expectations; 2 = meets expectations. You will receive full credit (30 points) for this assignment as long as you get “2” or above on 11 out of 12 entries; if your completed Reading Journal contains more than 1 unsatisfactory entry, the overall grade for this assignment will be reduced by 5 points for each such additional entry (e.g., if you receive “2” on 10 entries, and “1” on 2 entries, your total will be $30 - 5 = 25$ pts). Those students who consistently submit outstanding Reading Journal entries will be awarded extra points on this assignment (0.5 point per entry, up to 2 points total).

Religious Visitation Project

This is an independent “fieldwork” project to be undertaken outside of class time, which will involve a visit to a religious service in a tradition you are not already familiar with, and a subsequent written report on this visit (a.k.a. “visitation project paper”). Detailed guidelines for this assignment will be distributed via Blackboard later in the semester; we will also discuss them in class.

Extra Credit Opportunities

There will be occasional opportunities for extra credit assignments offered in the course of the semester; please check the Schedule of Readings and/or come talk to me if you are interested in this option.

Notes and Policies:

Disability:

Skidmore College is committed to providing students with disabilities full and meaningful access to all college programs and activities and strives to offer individualized accommodations necessary for students to realize an equal opportunity to succeed. To arrange for special accommodations, you will need to contact the Coordinator for Students with Disabilities in Student Academic Services (Starbucks Center, tel. 518.580.8150, http://cms.skidmore.edu/academic_services/accessibility/index.cfm). You should also talk to the instructor as early in the semester as possible.

Academic Integrity:

I will expect all students enrolled in this course to adhere to standards of academic integrity outlined in Skidmore’s Honor Code (http://cms.skidmore.edu/student_handbook/honor-code.cfm) and avoid any forms of academic dishonesty. All suspected cases of academic dishonesty (such as plagiarism) will be referred to the Dean of Studies and may incur such penalties as a failing grade on a part or the whole of course requirements or removal from the course, at instructor’s discretion.

Course Outline and Schedule of Readings*

*Any changes will be announced in class, via e-mail and/or on Blackboard

All readings must be completed prior to the class period for which they are assigned; please don't forget to bring your copies of books and/or course readers to class. Reading designations: "t" = read from/to the first full paragraph at the top of the page; "m" = the middle of the page; "b" = the last full paragraph at the bottom of page; no designation at all means you should read the entire page

I. Introduction

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| Sep 10-15 | <p>Introduction to the Course and the Study of Religion</p> <p><i>Readings:</i> Livingston, 3-33t, 125m-127t
 Selections from Geertz, <i>Interpretation of Cultures</i> (CR)
 Selections from Pals, <i>Seven Theories of Religion</i> (CR)</p> |
| Sep 17-22 | <p>Religion in Popular Culture</p> <p><i>Readings:</i> Hoover, “Visual Religion in Media Culture” (CR)
 Selections from Martin and Ostwalt, <i>Screening the Sacred</i> (CR)
 Selections from Vogler, <i>The Writer’s Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers</i> (CR)</p> <p><i>Video:</i> <i>Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade</i> (we’ll watch selected episodes in class; I’m presuming [hopefully, correctly] that most of you are familiar with this cinematographic opus)</p> <p>Reading Journal Entry # 1 due in class Sep 22</p> |
| Sep 24 | <p>The Sacred. Conceptions of the Ultimate Reality</p> <p><i>Readings:</i> Livingston, 37-42b, 153-79 (skim through ch.8 to get a general sense of the major categories and terms), 330b-33.
 Selections from Otto, <i>The Idea of the Holy</i> (CR)
 Eck, 22m-31
 Selections from <i>Speaking of Silence</i> (CR)</p> <p>Reading Journal # 2 due Sep 24</p> |

II. Talking About the Sacred

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| Sep 29 | <p>Religious Symbols. Myth</p> <p><i>Readings:</i> Livingston, 53-58, 63-68b</p> <p><i>The Homeric Hymn to Demeter</i> (CR)</p> <p>Genesis 1:1-3 (CR)</p> <p>Reading Journal # 3 due Sep 29</p> |
| Oct 1 | <p>Parable</p> <p><i>Readings:</i> Livingston, 59-62</p> <p>The Parables of Jesus, selections (CR)</p> <p>Reading Journal # 4 due Oct 1</p> |

- Oct 6 Mystical Languages
 Readings: Rumi, selected poems (CR)
 Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology* (CR)
 Selections from Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings* (CR)
 Reading Journal # 5 due Oct 6

III. Imaging the Sacred

- Oct 8 Religion and/as Visual Practice. Issues of Visual representation in Western Religious Traditions
 Readings: Selections from Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice*, selections (CR)
 Miles, "Image" (CR)
 Averintsev, "Visions of the Invisible: The Dual Nature of The Icon" (CR)
 Reading Journal # 6 due Oct 8
- Oct 13 Seeing the Divine Image in India
 Readings: Eck, 3-22m, 32-58
 Video: 330 Million Gods and/or Puja
 Reading Journal # 7 due Oct 13
- Oct 15-20 Religious Seeing in Film
 Video: *Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter... and Spring.*
 Readings: Conroy, "Seeing with Buddha's Eyes," *Journal of Religion and Film* 11:2
 <http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol11no2/ConroyBuddha.htm>
 Livingston, 81m-82, 223m-27m, 246-47m, 309b-11 (read to get some background on Buddhist theology and ethics)
 Reading Journal # 8 due Oct 20
- [Oct 21] Extra Credit Opportunity: Talk by Joel Kaminsky (Smith College) on the Bible and the Question of Intolerance, 8 p.m.
- Oct 22 **TEST # 1**

IV. Locating the Sacred

- Oct 27 Sacred Space
 Readings: Livingston, 42b-49b
 Selections from Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* (CR)
 J.Z. Smith, "Earth and Gods" (CR)
 Eck, 59-63b
 Reading Journal # 9 due Oct 27

- Oct 29 Sacred Lands
Readings: Deloria, "Sacred Land and Religious Freedom" (CR)
Video: *In the Light of Reverence*
Reading Journal # 10 due Oct 29
- Nov 3 Pilgrimage: Seeking the Sacred
Readings: Eck, 63b-75
Wolfe, "The Real Mecca" (CR) + Livingston, 302b-304t
Video: TBA
Reading Journal # 11 due Nov 3
- Nov 5 The New "Sacred Spaces"?
Readings: Selections from Ira Zepp, *The New Religious Image of Urban America* (CR)
Reading Journal # 12 due Nov 5
- Nov 10 No class, I will be at the American Academy of Religion meeting

V. Ritual

- Nov 12 Types and Functions of Ritual Action
Readings: Livingston, 74-89m, 92m-93
Video: *Ritual: Three Portraits of Jewish Life*
Reading Journal # 13 due Nov 12
- Nov 17 Sacrifice
Readings: Livingston, 89m-92m
Genesis 22, Leviticus 3, 17, 16 (CR)
Selections on Animal Sacrifice from Hesiod, *Theogony*, and
Zaidman and Pantel, *Religion in the Ancient Greek City* (CR)
Selections from Carrasco, *Religions of Mesoamerica* (CR)
Reading Journal # 14 due Nov 17
- Nov 19 Embodying the Sacred
Readings: Helminski, "Naked and Vulnerable on Ramadan" (CR) +
Livingston, 300m-302b
Selections from Shaw, *Passionate Enlightenment* (CR) +
Livingston, 363m-365t
Philip Zarrilli, "What Does it Mean to 'Become the
Character': Power, Presence, and Transcendence in Asian
in-Body Disciplines of Practice" (CR)
Video: *I'm a Sufi, I'm a Muslim* and/or *The Changing Face of Worship*
Reading Journal # 15 due Nov 19
- Nov 24 No class, I will be at the Society of Biblical Literature meeting
- Nov 26 No class, Thanksgiving Break

VI. Identity, Gender, Society

- Dec 1 Women's Roles and Voices
 Readings: Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of St. Macrina* (CR)
 Phyllis Tribble, "Eve and Adam: Genesis 2-3 Reread" (CR)
 Kecia Ali, "Rethinking Women's Issues in Muslim
 Communities" (CR)
 Leila Dabbagh, "Muhammad's Legacy for Women" (CR)
 Saraji Umm Zaid, "Why Every Mosque Should be Women-
 Friendly" (CR)
 Samer Hathout, "Abuse, Polygamy, Exclusion: Three Stories
 of American-Muslim Women" (CR)
 Livingston, 365t-373m
 Reading Journal # 16 due Dec 1
- Dec 3 Religion in the Contemporary Society: Challenges and Possibilities
 Readings: Livingston, 342m-357t, 373m-393t
 Reading Journal # 17 due Dec 3
- Dec 8 Course Wrap-up (Visitation Project Discussions / Course Review / Test
 Review)
- Dec 10 TEST # 2**
- Dec 16 Visitation Project Papers due by 5 p.m. at Ladd 215**