

**Comparative Religious Thought I, Jeffrey Wattles, instructor**  
Philosophy 21020/18095/003 Fall 2009, 219 Bowman, MWF 9:55-10:45

What would it take to launch a world-wide spiritual renaissance that could reduce the average level of materialism and selfishness to liberate accelerated progress on our planetary problems? What ways are there to move beyond the conflict that often mars relations between religions? To venture a progressive step, this course introduces beliefs, ideals, and practices of Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Diversity element: The course focuses on Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, each of which is alive in northeast Ohio. The course employs intellectually diverse methods--scientific, philosophic, and religious. Our approach emphasizes affirming our common humanity, understanding differences, and appreciating the wonderful uniqueness of each personality. This course satisfies Kent State University's diversity requirement.

### **Texts**

1. Pocket **Bhagavad Gita** (Paperback) translated by Winthrop Sargeant (State University of New York Press; Pocket Edition) ISBN-10: 0791420302 ISBN-13: 978-0791420300. The bookstore had a few copies of this text, which is currently out of stock.
2. Glenn Wallis: *The Dhammapada* (Modern Library. ISBN-10: 0812977270).
3. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha (3<sup>rd</sup> edition augmented)*, ISBN 0-19-528883-4.
4. *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an* A. Yusuf Ali Amanat Corporation; 10th edition (2001) (ISBN: 0915957760 ).

### **Evaluation**

We are *a community of inquiry*, and our interaction has a life of its own; so you are expected to attend regularly (unless you are sick), be on time, have the reading done, and be ready to participate. If you must miss more than a couple classes, let me know. *Doctor's notes are not needed.* If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to get notes from someone else, to ask the instructor if you still have questions, and to ask the instructor for whatever may have been handed back during your absence. In case of an epidemic or other emergency, arrangements will be made for computer-based interaction. Finally, in some cases, there are materials to read and print out and bring with you from the 2002 course website, <http://fp.dl.kent.edu/jwattles/default.htm> (*be sure not to take syllabus indications or project assignments from this older site*). A link to this 2002 site will be found at the *Comparative Religious Thought* area on the "classes" webpage: <http://www.personal.kent.edu/~jwattles/classes.htm>, where you will see the link to the current course page, with the syllabus and additional notes. So: evaluation: participation, 10 points; three papers, 20 points each; five quizzes, 10 points each (total 120 points). Please be sure to review university policy regarding academic cheating and plagiarism, summarized in a document toward the top of the "classes" webpage (see previous URL).

Papers must be well written to receive a C or above. For a quick introduction to some of the standards, see <http://www.personal.kent.edu/~jwattles/papers.htm>. Writing—a skill that schools sometimes fail to teach—is important for your career, especially when so much communication is mediated by machines. English is a first or

second language in many nations, and to use the language well is a service to our world. If I don't fuss about writing, you should *see* what some folks hand in! So I fuss, and I generally get quite decent writing. It's a good idea to familiarize yourself with the Writing Center (<http://dept.kent.edu/english/WritingCent/writngcenter.htm>). Speaking of communication, the University obliges you to check your kent.edu e-mail (or whatever address may be used on Flashline). If I have messages to send to the whole class, e.g., to change an assignment, or keep in touch in an emergency, I will use those addresses.

My **office hours** are MWF, 10:55-11:55 and TR 10:40-11:40 (Bowman 320H) and by appointment (330-672-0276; e-mail: [jwattles@kent.edu](mailto:jwattles@kent.edu)).

## Schedule of Activities

### I. Hinduism: One goal—spiritual liberation—and many paths

Week 1. Monday, August 31. Introductions. Today we draw on the 2002 course website for the following item from the Resources/Methods section: **Thoughts on Religion by Mohandas Gandhi**. Print this out after class. *When the syllabus lists web resources, you will be expected to print out, read, and bring them to class.*

Wednesday, September 2. (1) Read the Bhagavad Gita, chapters 1 and 2. (2) From Resources/Methods (2002): **Problems of Comparing Religions and Religious Experience and the Phenomenological Study of Religion**. (3) Today comes the handout (also on the 2009 course webpage) for **Project 1: spiritual action and approaching the divine spirit within**.

Fri. 4. Gita, chapters 3-5. Read, print out, and bring to class, from Resources/Methods, **The Evolution of the God Concept and An Anthropological Approach to Religion**.

Week 2. Mon. 7. Classes cancelled for Labor Day.

Wed. 9. Gita, Chapters 6-10.

Fri. 11. Chapters 9-11. Read and bring to class, from Resources/Methods: **Concepts of Truth in Religion**.

Week 3. Mon. 14. Chapters 12-15. Read the Resources/Hinduism section.

Wed. 16. Chapters 16-18. Discussion continued.

Fri. 18. **Quiz 1** on Hinduism. This will cover the text, related materials from the course website, and class discussions. 30 questions, mostly multiple-choice, which may include: What proportion of the reading did you complete?

### II. Buddhism: From the quest for enlightenment to compassion for all beings

Week 4. Mon. 21 *Dhammapada*, Chapters 1-4.

Wed. 23. Chapters 5-7. Guest lecture on mindfulness and meditation.

Fri. 25. Chapters 8-12.

Week 5. Mon. 28 **Project 1 due**

Wed. 30. Chapters 13-19.

Fri. October 2. Chapters 20-23.

Week 6. Mon. 5. Chapters 24-26, Website: Buddhism resource: The Heart Sutra

Wed 7. 2002 Website: Buddhism resource: Philosophy and spiritual experience.

Fri. 9. **Quiz 2**

### **III. Judaism: Righteousness and joy through faith in, and obedience to, the one God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth and the Lord of history**

Week 7. Mon. 12. History, covenant, and law. Genesis chapters 1-4 and 11-15 and Exodus 1-5 (pp. 8ff and 82ff in the Hebrew Bible [HB]). Consult maps at the back of our text, and read the Introductions to the Pentateuch, Genesis, and Exodus (pp. 3-10 and 82-84). Print out the Jewish history document from 2002 Resources/Judaism. Notice the texture of much of the writing: historical, with characters less idealized, less philosophical, and less spiritual in some sense; it's about a people, a covenant, a mission. Believe and obey.

Wed. 14 Leviticus, introduction and chapter 19 (p. 142ff) and Deuteronomy introduction, chapters 5, 6, and 32.1-8. Print both 2002 Judaism documents on Moses plus the methods document on feminism and theology. Handout on Project 2.

Fri. 16. Print out the resource on the prophets.

Week 8. Mon. 19. Isaiah, introductions and 40-55 (969ff).

Wed. 21. Introduction to Psalms and Psalms 1, 8, 19, 22, 23, and 42 (p. 775HB).

Fri. 23. Psalms 31, 104, 118, 119, 133.

Week 9. Mon. 26. Job, introductions and 1-7; 31; 38-42 (pp. 721ff.).

Wed. 28. Theodicy: God, suffering, meaning, and the limits of human understanding.

Fri. 30 **Quiz.**

### **V. Christianity: A gospel of love in the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth . . . and its outworking in history**

Week 10 (last week to withdraw). Mon. November 2. Read the introductions to the Gospels and also to Luke and Acts, and read also Luke 1-7, 10:25-37, and 15, and Acts 1-2. Print out and read Christianity Resources: Profiles of the life of Jesus of Nazareth. (starting on pp. 3 [New Testament], 93, and 183).

Wed. 4. Read Matthew (introduction and) chapters 5-7, 13:1-48, and 16:13-20 (p.7 NT ff.).

Fri. 6. Read and print out the 2002 Web resource, What is Jesus' gospel? In addition, read and print out <http://www.personal.kent.edu/~jwattles/MarkGosp.htm>

Week 11. Mon. 9. John 2.23-4.42, 7.14-10.18, and chapters 13-17.

Wed. 11. Veterans Day.

Fri. 13 . . . continued discussion of John

Week 12. Mon. 16. **Project 2 due.** Lecture on Paul.  
18 Highlights from the history of Christianity.  
20 **Quiz**

## V. Islam: Dynamism through living the will of God

Week 13. Mon. 23. Surahs 1 and 92-102. Read and print out  
Resources/Methods/Dialogue.  
25 Surah 103-114.  
27. Thanksgiving

Week 14. Mon. 30. Surah 2.  
24 Wed. December 2. . . .  
26 Surah 19

Week 15. Mon. 7. Surah 8 (and bring your Bible for comparison) and the concept of  
jihad.  
Wed. 9. 2002 Website resource on Ali Shari'ati.  
Fri. 11. **Project 3 due.**

Final Examination: Wednesday, December 16, 10:15 – 12:30.

The official registration deadline for this course is 9/13. University policy requires all students to be officially registered in each class they are attending. Students who are not officially registered for a course by published deadlines should not be attending classes and will not receive credit or a grade for the course. Each student must confirm enrollment by checking his/her class schedule (using Student Tools in FlashFast) prior to the deadline indicated. Registration errors must be corrected prior to the deadline. The last day to withdraw is 11/08.

University Policy 3342-3-01.3 requires that students with disabilities be provided reasonable accommodations to ensure their equal access to course content. If you have a documented disability and require accommodations, please contact the instructor at the beginning of the semester to make arrangements for necessary classroom adjustments. Please note, you must first verify your eligibility for these through Student Accessibility Services (contact 330-672-3391 or visit [www.kent.edu/sas](http://www.kent.edu/sas) for more information on registration procedures).

The Philosophy Department Grievance Procedure for handling student grievances is in conformity with the Student Academic Complaint Policy and Procedures set down as University Policy 3342-4-16 in the University Policy Register. For details of the grievance procedure, please see the Departmental Chairperson.