



World Religions

HUM 2093

The Thou encounters me by grace—it cannot be found by seeking. — Martin Buber, I and Thou

This is my simple religion. There is no need for temples; no need for complicated philosophy. Our own brain, our own heart is our temple; the philosophy is kindness. — The 14th Dalai Lama

Spring 2025 • Jan 21 – May 16, 2025 • Internet
 Final Group Recording: due by May 16 11:59 p.m.
 James R. Adair • james.adair@utsa.edu
 Office hours by appointment via Zoom
 210-363-8230
 Class website: <http://rosetta.reltech.org/UTSA/HUM2093/>

This course is fully online in an asynchronous format.

This course has no required meeting times. All materials, activities and evaluations are provided asynchronously. There will be two optional synchronous Zoom sessions on Thursday, Jan 23, at 5:00 pm, and Friday, Jan 24, at 5:00 pm to allow students to meet the instructor and ask questions about the class. These sessions are optional and not part of your final grade.

I. Course Description

What is religion? What are its origins? How do its current practitioners live? Are the major world religions really all that different? How does religion interact with the modern world? These are some of the questions we will explore as we delve into the history, beliefs, practices, and phenomenology of religion. We will examine in detail several of the largest religions—Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Chinese folk religions (including Daoism and Confucianism), Judaism, Christianity, Islam—as well as other selected religious traditions. Through personal exploration, individual and group research projects, and online classroom discussion, we will also explore issues that cut across several different religious traditions.

II. Course Aims and Objectives

Aims

Students will learn about selected religious traditions from around the world; will analyze issues and concepts such as good and evil, divine and human, war and peace, science, and ethics from a variety of religious perspectives; and will understand the religious traditions studied on their own terms and in the context of other religious traditions.

Specific Learning Objectives

- Students will gain a basic knowledge of the beliefs and practices of the world's largest religious traditions.
- Students will gain a basic knowledge of the beliefs and practices of other selected religious traditions.
- Students will learn to identify and reject pejorative stereotypes associated with specific religious traditions.
- Students will observe and/or participate in organized religious services of at least three religious traditions.
- Students will analyze current topics that concern people in many or all religious traditions.

III. Format and Procedures

This is an online, asynchronous class that is based on a weekly schedule of assignments, including readings, prescribed viewing of videos, and written papers and group work to be submitted through Canvas. Students are expected to read or view assigned material by the due date listed on the class website. Assigned papers, projects, and discussions are also due by the designated date. Class announcements, assignments, and supplementary material will be available on Canvas and/or the class website.

Assignments should be submitted to Canvas on the due date no later than 11:59 p.m. Assignments are due on the assigned date regardless of illness, work schedule, or other complications. Late work will be penalized one letter grade per week (or portion of week), with a minimum penalty of half a letter grade (e.g., for work submitted one day after the due date). Students experiencing extraordinary circumstances (e.g., an excused absence lasting an entire week) that prohibit turning in an assignment on time may contact the instructor for guidance.

Students who email the instructor should include HUM2093 at the beginning of the subject line of the email, followed by whatever other subject information is relevant.

IV. Course Requirements

1. Class Attendance, Participation, and Assignments

Students will endeavor to turn in every assignment on time, every week, and participate in all work assigned to their group. Students who fail to participate in groups discussions and presentations will be penalized. Excused absences are illness, death in the family, and officially sponsored UTSA activities. The student will be expected to provide documentation for all excused absences. Students who are absent, whether the absence is excused or unexcused, are expected to complete assignments on time (see section III). Students who know in advance they will be absent may make arrangements to turn in assignments or take tests early.

Unless otherwise specified, all written assignments should be printed in Times or Times New Roman font, 12 point type, double-spaced, with one-inch margins on all four sides, and follow MLA specifications. Papers with a minimum page count specified will be considered short of the required minimum if they employ excessive margins. For example, **a three-page paper must**

extend to the bottom of the third page, or it will be considered a two-page paper. Charts, illustrations, and other non-textual material may be included in a paper when appropriate—in fact, they may well improve a paper in some instances—but the non-textual material will not be counted toward the total page count, so students should adjust the length of their papers accordingly.

2. Course Readings

The class text is:

Urubshurow, Victoria Kennick. *Introducing World Religions*. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Students will read the following book and record discussions of each chapter with their assigned group:

Kimball, Charles. *When Religion Becomes Evil*. Rev. ed. New York: HarperOne, 2008.

Students will write a book review of the following book (more information below):

Martel, Yann. *Life of Pi*. Boston: Mariner Books, 2003.

Students will read and react to two religious traditions discussed in the following book (more information below):

Urban, Hugh B. *New Age, Neopagan, & New Religious Movements*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2015.

Other online readings will be assigned, and videos will be assigned for students to watch as well.

3. Encountering Different Religious Traditions

Over the course of the semester, students will visit three places of worship representing different religious traditions (e.g., Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Sikhism, etc.). Although online virtual visits are allowed, I strongly encourage students to visit at least two place of worship in person. Students will submit a “visit report” describing the activities witnessed and reactions to the experience. Each visit report will be a minimum of **three pages, double-spaced**. Up to two additional visit reports will be accepted for extra credit. Although students may choose houses of worship from any three religious traditions, they are strongly encouraged to choose religious traditions with which they are not already extremely familiar. For example, a student who was raised as a Protestant Christian who wants to visit a Christian house of worship should consider visiting a Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox congregation. A list of suggested houses of worship will be posted on the class website, but students are free to visit any congregation or community they like. The first visit report is due during the 7th week of class, and the second is due during the 12th week. The third visit report and any extra credit reports are due on or before May 9 (not during the final exam period). **Make sure to include the name of the place of worship you visited, the religious tradition represented, and the date of the visit.**

Please note that while students are free to visit Messianic Jewish congregations for their visit

reports, these congregations (for the purposes of this class) count as groups related to Christian, not Jewish, traditions. Also, the following churches are all part of the Christian tradition: Roman Catholic, Protestant, Eastern Orthodox, Mormon, Jehovah's Witness.

When visiting places of worship or religious activity, especially in person, and when interviewing people (see following section):

- contact the house of worship in advance and let them know you would like to attend a service, and ask if they have any suggestions about dress or conduct
- listen more, talk less
- watch & take notes
- do not record either audio or video (including photos) unless you have permission beforehand
- when asking questions, allow the interviewee to use his/her own language to describe things
- avoid questions that compare one religion to another; think about each religion in its own terms
- be friendly and gracious to your hosts
- feel free to join in activities if invited to do so, but if it makes you uncomfortable, it's fine to decline

4. Interviews

Each student will interview three practitioners of different religious traditions, preferably people who are congregational or other types of leaders in the religious community. Students will develop a questionnaire or script to be followed during the interview, which will include a minimum of ten questions, but it is fine to deviate from the questionnaire as long as at least ten questions and answers are recorded. The interviewees may be members of the houses of worship visited during the course of the semester, but they don't have to be. There is **no specified length for the interview reports**, and they may be single-spaced. Try to avoid questions that allow one word responses like "yes," "no," "sometimes." If you get one-word responses, be prepared to ask follow-up or additional questions. At least one interview must be conducted in person or by phone, video chat, etc.; the others may be conducted in person, by phone, or by email or other means of correspondence (e.g., social media). Up to two additional interview reports will be accepted for extra credit, as long as they represent religious traditions not already covered in a previous interview. The first interview report is due during the 7th week of class, and the second is due during the 12th week. The third interview report and any extra credit reports are due on or before May 9 (not during the final exam period). **Make sure to include the name of the person you interviewed, the religious tradition the interviewee represents, and the date of the interview. If the interviewee doesn't want his/her name included, put "name withheld at interviewee's request."**

5. Book Report and Discussion

Students will read *Life of Pi* and write a book report on it, **focusing especially on the way in which the book deals with the topic of religion**. The book report will be a minimum of **five pages, double-spaced**. It is due on Apr 26.

6. Group Presentations and Discussions

Every student will be assigned to one of six groups, which will work together on group discussions during weeks 4–11, on group presentations during weeks 14–15, and on the final group discussion on Hugh Urban's book, *New Age, Neopagan, & New Religious Movement* (see item #7 below).

For the group discussions during weeks 4–11 (except week 8), students will read an assigned chapter in Charles Kimball's *When Religion Becomes Evil* and record a discussion of the chapter with the rest of the group. The discussion may be recorded in either audio or video format, and one person in the group should submit it on Canvas (submit either an audio or video file or a link to the discussion online). Each chapter's discussion should be between 10 and 15 minutes long, and it should **start with a list of students** in the group who participated in the discussion. Different group members may submit the discussions for the different chapters. Make sure to indicate which group you are at the beginning of the recording.

For the group presentations assignment during weeks 14–15, each group will create two **audio-visual** presentations on assigned topics. These presentations may be YouTube videos, PowerPoint with embedded audio and video, or something similar. Each presentation should be a minimum of 15 minutes long, and it must include a **bibliography** of at least **ten sources**, relevant to the topic of discussion, that meet the criteria found in the document on the class website entitled "Sources for Academic Research." A list of the students who participated in creating the presentation should also be included. **Each group should choose a student in the group to be responsible for submitting the presentation (or a link to the presentation) in Canvas by the designated due date.**

YOUR PARTICIPATION AS PART OF YOUR ASSIGNED GROUP IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF YOUR FINAL GRADE!

7. Final Group Discussion on Other Religious Traditions

In lieu of a final exam, students will meet with other members of their assigned group and discuss two assigned chapters from the book by Hugh B. Urban, *New Age, Neopagan, & New Religious Movements*. The group will record the discussions of the two assigned chapters and submit an audio file of the discussions. The discussion of **each chapter** should be between 20 and 30 minutes long, and all members of the group should participate. **Each group should choose a student (or two, one for each chapter) in the group to be responsible for submitting the audio recording (or a link to the audio recording) in Canvas by the designated due date.** The recordings of the discussions of the two chapters may be combined into a single recording before submitting. If they are not combined, two different students will have to submit them on Canvas. This group discussion is due no later than May 16.

8. Exams

Students will have two regular exams, at the beginning of the 8th and 12th weeks of class. In lieu of a final exam, students will submit audio files of their group's discussions by the last day of the semester (May 16, see #7 above).

Note on submissions that have length requirements: If a paper has a length requirement, full

credit will be given only if the submitted paper has text that reaches to the bottom of the page (not halfway down the page, for example). Cover sheets and bibliographies don't count toward the total page length.

9. Discussions (Discussion Board)

Canvas has a feature called Discussions (it was called the Discussion Board on Blackboard) that allows students to communicate with one another and with the instructor. The instructor will create discussions from time to time throughout the semester, and students may respond if they'd like. Discussions are optional and may contain information about class procedures, discussions about one or more religious traditions, or questions that participants might have. Discussions will not be graded.

V. Grading

The student's grade will be determined as follows:

- a. Reports on visits to houses of worship: 15% (+ up to 4 points added to the visit report grade average for up to two additional visits)
- b. Interviews: 15% (+ up to 4 points added to the interview grade average for up to two additional interviews)
- c. Book report on *Life of Pi*: 10%
- d. Group discussions on Kimball's book and Week 13-14 presentations: 20%
- e. Exam 1: 15%
- f. Exam 2: 15%
- g. Final group discussions on other religious traditions (audio recording): 10%
- h. Extra credit: up to 5 points may be earned for extra credit assignments given over the course of the semester (all extra credit submissions are due by May 9)

Rubric for visit reports, book report, and other written assignments:

spelling, grammar, and style: 20%
 organization: 20%
 content and originality: 60%
 points may be subtracted for submissions below the minimum page length

Rubric for interviews:

spelling, grammar, and style: 20% (note: feel free to quote the interviewee directly, even if their response doesn't follow the rules of Standard Written English)
 quality and interest of questions: 80% (if interviewees give one-word answers, like "yes" or "no," use follow-up questions to try to obtain more information)—have some supplementary questions ready in case the interviewee doesn't want to answer a particular question
 points will be subtracted for submissions with fewer than ten questions and answers

Letter grades will be assigned according to the following table:

A+: 97-100	B+: 87-89	C+: 77-79	D+: 67-69	F: below 60
A: 93-96	B: 83-86	C: 73-76	D: 63-66	
A-: 90-92	B-: 80-82	C-: 70-72	D-: 60-62	

VI. Subject to Change

Assignments, grades, schedules, and other items detailed in this syllabus are subject to change at the instructor's discretion. The instructor will give students reasonable notice of any changes that are made.

VII. Supplemental Information

UTSA offers many services to help students succeed in their classes. Some of the offices that provide these services are Counseling Services, Student Disability Services, and the Tomás Rivera Center, which offers Supplemental Instruction and Tutoring. Information on these services, as well as the Student Code of Conduct and Scholastic Dishonesty policies, can be found on the following web page: <http://provost.utsa.edu/syllabus.asp>. Please read the information on this page, which may be considered an appendix to this syllabus.