

Lenny J. Lowe, Ph.D.
Department of Religious Studies
College of Charleston

Office: RELS building 4A Glebe St., room 102
Office hours: Wednesdays, 11am – 2pm
E-mail: lowelj@cofc.edu Phone: 843.953.8033

RELS 105 Intro to World Religion SPRING 2024

No Prerequisites; Fulfills GenEd Humanities Requirements

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is designed to introduce students to the idea of “World Religions” and the collective perspectives and practices to which the category refers. In service of this goal, we will examine several of the most widely practiced “religions,” exploring both historical and contemporary practices, objects, and beliefs. As we explore this “data,” however, we will also keep in our minds two foci: (1) *the reality of variety within these religious cultures*, and (2) *the cultural and political stakeholders*. The course will be delivered using both lectures and frequent in-class discussions as well as music, film, and other media.



COURSE OBJECTIVES

The primary objectives of the course include:

- 1) The course aims to cultivate an appreciation for the variety of thought, practice, and values associated with many of the most dominant world religious cultures.
- 2) The course also aims to develop a critical-analytical approach to thinking about “religion” and religious cultures around the world.
- 3) Finally, the course will help students recognize the economic, political, and social impacts of religion and religious difference in the contemporary world.

GENERAL EDUCATION SLOS (STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES)

- 1) *Students analyze how ideas are represented, interpreted or valued in various expressions of human culture.*
- 2) *Students examine relevant primary source materials as understood by the humanities area under study and interpret the material in writing assignments.*

****Both SLOs will be evaluated in analytical writing assignment.**

REQUIRED TEXTS

Prothero, Stephen. *Religion Matters: An Introduction to the World's Religions*. New York: W.W. Norton Publishers, 2020.

All supplemental readings will be provided via OAKS Course Page with accompanying citation information.

REQUIRED TECHNOLOGY

At minimum, students should have access to a laptop or desktop computer. I expect that most if not all students will have a cellphone. No special software or other tools or technology are required. NONE of these are required IN the classroom, and I even actively discourage their use if you can avoid it. Cell phones should be used ONLY for attendance and then put away for the duration of the class.

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance:

In this course, we make robust use of OAKS (our online course page) for things like *readings*, *weekly discussion forums*, *quizzes*, *announcements*, *emails*, etc. All of these constitute “participation” in this class. “Attendance,” however, is fully dependent upon your **actual, physical, bodily presence in the classroom**. Especially in a small course that centers on lots of critical dialogue, it is absolutely essential that you make every effort to be present. Our standard attendance policy is as follows:

- If you are symptomatically ill (with COVID or ANYTHING ELSE!) please do not come to class. It is your responsibility to let me know what’s up and try to keep up on your own.
- After six (6) absences (20% of classes), you will be removed from the class, or, if after appropriate withdrawal date, you will receive a failing grade for the class.
- Absences can be excused for **significant, prolonged illness, religious exemptions, extraordinary circumstances beyond your control**.

Communication:

I will work hard to help each of us to get to know one another, trust one another, and learn together. Here’s how we can communicate well:

- You should have a CofC email address linked to OAKS. Email is my most frequent and effective means of communication. Make sure you check your email daily! Please include “RELS 105” in the subject line of all emails to me or classmates.
- I will respond to emails within 24 hours on weekdays—I don’t check email on weekends, so if you email me on a weekend your response will wait until

Monday. Hence, the sooner you would like a response, the sooner you should write me.

- I will host open office hours once a week, on Wednesdays from 11am-2pm. Please feel free to stop by, or – if that time doesn't work well – make an appointment!

GENERAL POLICIES

Honor Code and Academic Integrity

Lying, cheating, attempted cheating, and plagiarism are violations of our Honor Code that, when suspected, are investigated. Each incident will be examined to determine the degree of deception involved.

Incidents where the instructor determines the student's actions are related more to misunderstanding and confusion will be handled by the instructor. The instructor designs an intervention or assigns a grade reduction to help prevent the student from repeating the error. The response is recorded on a form and signed both by the instructor and the student. It is forwarded to the Office of the Dean of Students and placed in the student's file.

Cases of suspected academic dishonesty will be reported directly by the instructor and/or others having knowledge of the incident to the Dean of Students. A student found responsible by the Honor Board for academic dishonesty will receive a XXF in the course, indicating failure of the course due to academic dishonesty. This status indicator will appear on the student's transcript for two years after which the student may petition for the XX to be expunged. The F is permanent.

Students can find the complete Honor Code and all related processes in the Student Handbook at: <http://studentaffairs.cofc.edu/honor-system/studenthandbook/index.php>.

On the Use of Automated Writing Tools (GAI)

Unless otherwise specified, the use of generative artificial intelligence (GAI), including ChatGPT and similar tools, is strictly prohibited in this course, even when appropriately referenced. The use of automated writing tools will be considered plagiarism and a violation of the CofC Honor Code.

Disability/Access Statements:

1. Any student eligible for and needing accommodations because of a disability is requested to speak with the professor during the first two weeks of class or as soon as the student has been approved for services so that reasonable accommodations can be arranged.

2. The College will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. Students should apply for services at the Center for Disability Services/SNAP located on the first floor of the Lightsey Center, Suite 104. Students approved for accommodations are responsible for notifying me as soon as possible and for contacting me one week before accommodation is needed.
3. This College abides by section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act. If you have a documented disability that may have some impact on your work in this class and for which you may require accommodations, please see an administrator at the Center of Disability Services/SNAP, 843.953.1431 or me so that such accommodation may be arranged.

OAKS

OAKS, including Gradebook, will be used for this course throughout the semester to provide the syllabus and class materials and grades for each assignment, which will be regularly posted.

Recording of Classes (via ZOOM)

Class sessions may be recorded via both voice and video recording. By attending and remaining in this class, the student consents to being recorded. Recorded class sessions are for instructional use only and may not be shared with anyone who is not enrolled in the class

Inclement Weather, Pandemic or Substantial Interruption of Instruction

If in-person classes are suspended, faculty will announce to their students a detailed plan for a change in modality to ensure the continuity of learning. All students must have access to a computer equipped with a web camera, microphone, and Internet access. Resources are available to provide students with these essential tools.

Center for Student Learning:

The Center for Student Learning's (CSL) academic support services provide assistance in study strategies, speaking & writing skills, and course content. Services include tutoring, Supplemental Instruction, study skills appointments, and workshops. Students of all abilities have become more successful using these programs throughout their academic career and the services are available to you at no additional cost. For more information regarding these services please visit the CSL website at <http://csl.cofc.edu> or call (843) 953-5635.

Mental & Physical Wellbeing:

At the college, we take every students' mental and physical wellbeing seriously. If you find yourself experiencing physical illnesses, please reach out to student health services (843.953.5520). And if you find yourself experiencing any mental health challenges (for example, anxiety, depression, stressful life events, sleep deprivation, and/or loneliness/homesickness) please consider contacting either the Counseling Center (professional counselors at <http://counseling.cofc.edu> or 843.953.5640 3rd Robert Scott Small Building) or the Students 4 Support (certified volunteers through texting "4support" to 839863, visit <http://counseling.cofc.edu/cct/index.php>, or meet with them in person 3rd Floor Stern

Center). These services are there for you to help you cope with difficulties you may be experiencing and to maintain optimal physical and mental health.

Food & Housing Resources:

Many CofC students report experiencing food and housing insecurity. If you are facing challenges in securing food (such as not being able to afford groceries or get sufficient food to eat every day) and housing (such as lacking a safe and stable place to live), please contact the Dean of Students for support (<http://studentaffairs.cofc.edu/about/salt.php>). Also, you can go to <http://studentaffairs.cofc.edu/student-food-housing-insecurity/index.php> to learn about food and housing assistance that is available to you. In addition, there are several resources on and off campus to help. You can visit the Cougar Pantry in the Stern Center (2nd floor), a student-run food pantry that provides dry-goods and hygiene products at no charge to any student in need. Please also consider reaching out to Professor ABC if you are comfortable in doing so.

Inclusion:

It is my aim, as part of our class commitments and my personal commitments as a member of society, to cultivate an inclusion classroom space, especially as regards an individual's identity. The College of Charleston offers many resources for LGBTQ+ students, faculty and staff along with their allies:

[Preferred Name and Pronoun Information](#)

[On Campus Gender Inclusive facilities](#)

[Campus Resources](#)

[College of Charleston Reporting Portals](#)

[National Resources for Faculty & Staff](#)

[GSEC Reports](#)

[Documenting LGBTQ Life in the Lowcountry](#) (CofC Adlestone Library Special Collections Project)

[College of Charleston Quality Enhancement Plan \(QEP\)](#)

[Articles about CofC and LGBTQ+ Issues](#)

RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATION FOR STUDENTS

The College of Charleston community is enriched by students of many faiths that have various religious observances, practices, and beliefs. We value student rights and freedoms, including the right of each student to adhere to individual systems of religion. The College prohibits discrimination against any student because of such student's religious belief or any absence thereof.

The College acknowledges that religious practices differ from tradition to tradition and that the demands of religious observances in some traditions may cause conflicts with student schedules. In affirming this diversity, like many other colleges and universities, the College supports the concept of "reasonable accommodation for religious observance" in regard to class attendance, and the scheduling of examinations and other academic work requirements, unless the accommodation would create an undue hardship on the College.

The accommodation request imposes responsibilities and obligations on both the individual requesting the accommodation and the College. Examples of reasonable accommodations for student absences might include: rescheduling of an exam or giving a make-up exam for the

student in question; altering the time of a student's presentation; allowing extra-credit assignments to substitute for missed class work or arranging for an increased flexibility in assignment dates. Regardless of any accommodation that may be granted, students are responsible for satisfying all academic objectives, requirements and prerequisites as defined by the instructor and by the College.

CLASSROOM EXPECTATIONS

YOU SHOULD:

- 1) Come to class regularly, on time, and prepared. Preparation means reading, *to the best of your ability and with strategy and attention*, all materials prior to the class meeting. Additionally, you should have thought critically about the materials and be ready with questions.
- 2) Make every effort to eliminate distractions and engage in the class session with your full attention.
- 3) Engage in discussion with classmates and professor in a way that is, affirmative, open, and above all, respectful. The classroom is a safe place to ask questions and express ideas, so never hesitate. However, words matter, and we are surrounded by differences. So, think carefully before you speak, and cultivate a curious, thoughtful, respectful way of engaging in the classroom.
- 4) Turn assignments in on time. In extraordinary circumstances, please contact me in advance or as soon as possible.

I WILL:

- 1) Always be on time, prepared, and happy to see you.
- 2) Patient, empathetic, energetic, and interesting.
- 3) Concerned about your academic success and also your personal well-being and happiness.
- 4) Fair in my policies and respectful of your time and energy.
- 5) Available throughout the semester at most times of the day to either: sit with you, listen to you, or help you with whatever you need.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Your final grade will be determined on the basis of the total points you earn.

Writing Project (50 Pts.)

- Site Visit Essay (50 Pts.)

Discussion Threads (5 pts. each = 50 Points)

- 10 online semi-formal discussions. (OAKS)

Quizzes (20 Points Each = 100 Points)

- 5 Module Quizzes (OAKS)

Exams (50 Points Each = 100 Points)

- Midterm (OAKS)
- Final Exam (OAKS)

TOTAL = 300 POINTS

Your grade will be determined based on 300 possible points.

A =	93% - 100%	(279 – 300 pts.)
A- =	90% - 92%	(270 – 279 pts.)
B+ =	88% - 89%	(264 – 269 pts.)
B =	83% - 87%	(249 – 263 pts.)
B- =	80% - 82%	(240 – 248 pts.)
C+ =	78% - 79%	(234 – 239 pts.)
C =	73% - 77%	(219 – 233 pts.)
C- =	70% - 72%	(210 – 218 pts.)
D+ =	68% - 69%	(204 – 209 pts.)
D =	63% - 67%	(189 – 203 pts.)
D- =	60% - 62%	(180 – 188 pts.)
F =	59% or Below	(178 pts. or below)

Course Summary, Objectives, and Assignments

MODULE 1 – INTRODUCTIONS

January 11 – January 21

This is a short, introductory module that will orient you to the course, to me, to one another, and to the academic study of religion.

Objectives:

- Students will become familiar with the course, expectations, classmates
- Students will understand the complexity of the term “religion”

- Students will understand the difference between “Religious Studies” and “Theology”
- READ:
 - Prothero, “Chapter 1 Introduction: Why Religion Matters” pp. 3 – 25
- DO:
 - Module 1 QUIZ
 - Discussion #1

MODULE 2 – RELIGIONS OF RELEASE ~HINDUISM, BUDDHISM, SIKHISM~ January 23 - February 11

This module introduces students to religions that have emerged in the Indian Subcontinental context. These religions share much in common, including conceptions of the structure of the universe, and subtly different understandings of what the ultimate “goal” of religion is. This results in sometimes radically different and sometimes quite similar ritual practices.

Objectives:

- Students will become familiar with important terms like *samsara*, *moksha*, and *atman*
- Students will become familiar with the geographies and cultures of the Indian Subcontinent
- Students will be able to compare and contrast the different understandings of god/God/gods, the human self, and the nature of the universe.
- Students will be able to recognize the diversity within the generalizations that are necessary in the study of religion
- READ:
 - Chapter 2 “Hinduism: The Way of Devotion” pp. 26-78
 - Chapter 3 “Buddhism: The Way of Awakening” pp. 79-128
 - Chapter 4 “Sikhism: The Way of the Guru” pp. 129 - 178
- DO:
 - Module 2 QUIZ
 - Discussion #2
 - Discussion #3
 - Discussion #4

MODULE 3 – RELIGIONS OF REPAIR

~Judaism, Christianity, Islam~

February 13 – March 17

This module introduces the three most well known so-called “Abrahamic” religions. These three all emerge from the Mediterranean Basin at different moments separated by many centuries. All three traditions root their understanding of “one God” in the patriarch Abraham, but they have all taken very different paths that bring them into cooperation and conflict throughout history.

Objectives:

- Students will become familiar with important terms from each tradition.
- Students will become familiar with the sacred texts and important theological differences that characterize these three religions.
- Students will be able to compare and contrast the different understandings of God, the human self, and the nature of the universe.
- Students will be able to recognize the diversity within the generalizations that are necessary in the study of religion
- **READ:**
 - Prothero, PART II
 - Chapter 5 Judaism: The Way of Exile and Return, pp. 170 – 224
 - Chapter 6 Christianity: The Way of Salvation, pp. 225 – 292
 - Chapter 7 Islam: The Way of Submission, pp. 293 -- 338
- **DO:**
 - Module 3 QUIZ
 - Discussion #5
 - Discussion #6
 - Discussion #7

MODULE 4 – RELIGIONS OF RELATIONSHIP

~YORUBA, KONGO, HAITIAN VODOU~

March 19 - 31

This module engages with a set of traditions that emerge out of the violence of transatlantic slavery. We begin by examining the West African traditions of Yoruba and Kongo, and then we trace them as they combine with European Christianity in the Atlantic world context. This module offers an opportunity to reflect upon the idea of religious combination, the use of bodies and materials in religion, and challenges to binary moral systems.

Objectives:

- Students will become familiar with important terms from each tradition.
 - Students will become familiar with the specific ritual practices of these traditions
 - Students will be able to compare and contrast the different understandings of the human self and the nature of the universe.
 - Students will be able to recognize the diversity within the generalizations that are necessary in the study of religion
- READ:
 - Supplemental Readings (in OAKS)
 - Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*
 - Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen*
 - Elizabeth McAlister, *Rara!*
 - DO:
 - Module 4 QUIZ
 - Discussion #8

MODULE 5 – RELIGIONS OF REVERSION
~CONFUCIANISM, DAOISM ~
April 2 – April 14

This module introduces only TWO traditions (in order to make space for you to write your essay), both coming from ancient China. Confucianism and Daoism are both deeply interwoven into the ambient culture of China, and neither is exclusive of the other. Yet, they introduce different ideas about how to live the best life. This module will also be a great opportunity to consider what we MEAN when we call something a “religion” since neither of these has a strong concept of “God”.

Objectives:

- Students will become familiar with important terms from each tradition.
 - Students will become familiar with the founders and histories of each of these traditions and the way they each understand the role of the individual in the world.
 - Students will be able to compare and contrast the different understandings of the human self and the nature of the universe.
 - Students will be able to recognize the diversity within the generalizations that are necessary in the study of religion
- READ:
 - Chapter 8 Confucianism: The Way of Ritual Propriety, pp. 340-390
 - Chapter 9 Daoism: The Way of Flourishing, pp. 391-440.

- **DO:**
 - **Module 5 QUIZ**
 - **Discussion #9**
 - **Discussion #10**

CONCLUSION: ATHEISM, PLURALISM, AND POLITICS

April 16 - 23

Our final module considers the idea of Atheism AS A RELIGION vs. AS ANTI-RELIGION. This module also offers us some general conclusions to our course.

Objectives:

- **Students will become familiar with the long history of atheism.**
 - **Students will critically consider how “atheism as religion” challenges our understanding of religion**
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- **READ:**
 - **Prothero, PART IV**
 - **Chapter 11 Atheism: The Way of No Way, pp. 491-535**
- **DO:**
 - **Complete Course Evaluations**

COURSE SCHEDULE (By Week)

Date/Topic	Assignments
Week 1 - 2 (Jan. 11, 16, 18) INTRODUCTIONS Thursday: Introduction to Course Tuesday: What’s a “Religion”? Thursday: What are “Religions”?	 READ: Nongbri (OAKS); Syllabus DO: DISCUSSION #1; Quiz #1
Week 3 (Jan. 23. 25) HINDUISM Tuesday: Variations	READ: Prothero Ch. 2 “Hinduism”

<p>Thursday: Contemporary Issues</p>	<p>DO: DISCUSSION #2</p>
<p>Week 4 (Jan. 30, Feb. 1) BUDDHISM</p> <p>Tuesday: The Basic Tenets</p> <p>Thursday: Varieties of Buddhism</p>	<p>READ: Finish reading Prothero, Ch. 3 “Buddhism”; “The First and Final Addresses” (OAKS)</p> <p>DO: Discussion 3</p>
<p>Week 5 (Feb. 6, 8) SIKHISM</p> <p>Tuesday: Story of the Guru</p> <p>Thursday: Cultural Geography & Religion</p>	<p>READ: Prothero, Ch. 4 “Sikhism”</p> <p>DO: NO DISCUSSION; Module 2 Quiz</p>
<p>Week 6 (Feb. 13, 15) JUDAISM</p> <p>Tuesday: Mythic Origins</p> <p>Thursday: History and Scattering & Contemporary Politics</p>	<p>READ: Prothero, Ch. 5 “Judaism”;</p> <p>DO: Discussion #4</p>
<p>Week 7 (Feb. 20, 22) CHRISTIANITY Pt. 1</p> <p>Tuesday: Palestinian Origins & Variety</p> <p>Thursday: Political Power & Orthodoxy</p>	<p>READ: Prothero Ch. 6 “Christianity”</p> <p>DO: Discussion #5</p>
<p>Week 8 (Feb. 27, 29) CHRISTIANITY Pt. 2</p> <p>Tuesday: Charismaticism and Evangelicalism</p> <p>Friday: MIDTERM (IN CLASS)</p>	<p>READ: https://religiondispatches.org/the-only-surprising-thing-about-the-demon-sperm-doctors-views-is-that-theyre-shared-by-many-evangelicals/</p> <p>DO: No discussion; MIDTERM IN CLASS (OAKS)</p>

SPRING BREAK!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!	PARTY!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! BE SAFE
Week 9 (March 12, 14). ISLAM Tuesday: Basics, History, Context Thursday: Contemporary Varieties & Politics	 READ: Prothero Ch. 7 “ISLAM”: “Qur’an” (OAKS) DO: MODULE 3 QUIZ
Week 10 (March 19, 21) YORUBA & KONGO Tuesday: Destiny and Divinity in Yoruba Thursday: Materializing The Dead in Kongo	 READ: “Flash of the Spirit” (OAKS) DO: Discussion #6
Week 11 (March 26, 28) HAITIAN VODOU Tuesday: Vodou and Revolution Thursday: Healing and Harming	 READ: Desmangles, “Faces of the Gods” (OAKS); Deren, “The Trinity” (OAKS) DO: Discussion #7 (OAKS); MODULE 4 QUIZ
Week 12 (April 2, 4) CONFUCIANISM Tuesday: History & Context Thursday: Texts & Practices	 READ: Prothero Ch. 8 “Confucianism”; Excerpts from <i>The Analects</i> (OAKS) DO: Discussion #8 SITE VISIT PAPER DUE (via OAKS, Sunday April 7th)
Week 13 (April 9, 11). DAOISM Tuesday: History & Context Thursday: Texts & Practices	 READ: Prothero Ch. 9 “Daoism”; Siegler (OAKS) DO: Discussion #9

<p>Week 14 (April 16, 18). ATHEISM</p> <p>Tuesday: Historical Atheism</p> <p>Wednesday: Atheism as Religion</p>	<p>READ: Prothero Ch. 11 “Atheism”; “Why The World Needs Religious Studies” https://religiondispatches.org/why-the-world-needs-religious-studies/</p> <p>DO: Discussion #10</p>
<p>Week 15 (April 23)</p> <p>Monday: Conclusions</p>	<p>FINAL EXAMS: TBA (Check registrar.cofc.edu for final exam calendar)</p>

Religious Site visit

- *Write a 3 – 5 page essay that both describes and analyzes your experience at a religious site (a place you have visited THIS SEMESTER). It should contain a detailed account of your visit, the things you see, the sounds, the smells, the way you felt, the things that were interesting, the people you met, etc. (2 pages). The remaining three pages should attempt to compare what you learned in class about the tradition with what you say. For example, you might analyze how the teaching of “no-self” was a subject in the meditation 101 class that you attended. Or, you might want to analyze how “color” seemed to play an important role in the Hindu Temple that you visited, etc.*

Religious Site Visit List:

- *Central Mosque of Charleston* (Charleston, SC)
- *Circular Congregational Church* (Charleston, SC)
- *Columbia Zen Buddhist Priory* (Columbia, SC)
- *Greek Orthodox Church of the Holy Trinity* (Charleston, SC)
- *Hindu Temple in Charleston* (Charleston, SC)
- *Hindu Temple in Columbia* (Columbia, SC)
- *Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim*, (Charleston, SC--the birthplace of reform Judaism)
- *Meher Baba Hindu Spiritual Center* (Myrtle Beach, SC)
- *Mepkin Abbey Trappist Monastery* (Moncks Corner, SC)
- *Old St. Andrew's Parish* (Charleston, SC)
- *Tibetan Buddhist Society* (Charleston, SC)

- *St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church* (Charleston, SC)

BEST PRACTICES FOR FIELD SITE VISIT

- 1) *Remember that you are going into a religious community of humans. It is not a zoo. So, what you will be doing is “participant observation” not just “observation.”*
- 2) ***Please*** *contact the community that you would like to visit at least a few days in advance to ask permission for you to visit and “participate” with them.*
- 3) *Do not attend in groups larger than 3. Visiting as a group may help you to feel more comfortable, but large groups can make communities feel very objectified.*
- 4) *Ask your contact what would be appropriate for you to wear? Also, ask if it is ok if you take notes. (If not, don't worry about it. Just jot down some things immediately after).*
- 5) *Give your contact a FULL DISCLOSURE of who you are, what you are doing (i.e. doing something in order to fulfill a class assignment), and be willing to talk with someone afterward or attend any event that they invite you to attend (these can be some of the most fruitful ways to learn about a community).*

Ethnographic Methods for Students

- 1) ***You don't have to write everything down. Focus more on your experience and your participation while you are in it. Worry about writing soon after you leave the experience.***
- 2) ***Think about: what kind of people are here (i.e. demographics)? How did I feel when I came in? What kinds of words do I hear repeated in the lessons, conversations, music, etc.? How are people dressed? How do people seem to be interacting during the service? How is this the like what I expected? How is this surprisingly different than my expectations?***
- 3) ***What's happening here regarding the big frames of analysis: gender, politics, race, economy, etc.? Does anything stand out?***
- 4) ***When you leave, as soon as you are able, sit down and write as much as you can remember. Narrate the event and include your thoughts and reactions. Don't censor yourself. This will become your “fieldnotes.” You can reflect on them later.***