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### Course Description

This course will focus on three classic texts from India: the most famous Hindu text *The Bhagavad Gita*; *The Yoga Sutra* that is today considered a perennial classic and guide to yoga practice; *The Buddhacarita*, the first biography to tell the Buddha's life story in an epic poem known as. First, we will place these texts in their Hindu and Buddhist contexts and consider how they were used and understood in India. Then, we will examine how new meanings were discovered when these texts were translated in Europe and consumed in modern America. We will learn how to read "religiously" rather than as consumers and study how texts "script" religious experience and inform cultural norms. We will investigate how the texts become the object of veneration, what criteria are used to identify a text as "sacred" and a "classic," and how texts create authority. We will watch films and performances that reinterpret these texts for us today.

### Course Goals and Student Learning Outcomes

- to develop the ability to understand, interpret, and contextualize Hindu & Buddhist sacred texts
- to gain an appreciation for why these Hindu & Buddhist texts have endured as "classics"
- to develop critical interpretive skills by reading key works of scholarship whose authors attempt to translate, interpret, and situate these texts within their original cultures and their reception in the west
- to demonstrate effective writing skills with the ability to craft a persuasive argument in defense of a thesis by using and analyzing evidence from primary and secondary sources

This course also satisfies the **General Education Student Learning Outcomes in the Humanities:**  
 1) *Students analyze how ideas are represented, interpreted, and valued in various expressions of human culture;* 2) *Students examine relevant primary source materials as understood by the discipline and interpret the material in writing assignments.* Both General Education SLO will be assessed on the 2<sup>nd</sup> essay on the literary & religious content of the *Buddhacarita*, worth 17.5% of the overall grade.



Brahmin boy reading and memorizing Hindu scripture

### Required texts available at CofC Bookstore—Don't substitute Kindle editions or other translations!

- 1) *Bhagavad Gita: Krishna's Counsel in Time of War* transl. by Barbara Stoler Miller (Bantam, 1986)
- 2) *Bhagavad Gita: A Biography* by Richard Davis (Princeton University Press, 2015)
- 3) *Yoga: Discipline of Freedom*, translated by Barbara Stoler Miller (Bantam, 1995)
- 4) *Life of the Buddha*, translated by Patrick Olivelle (NYU Press, 2009)

There are also required **E-Readings (ER#1-16)**, pdf of selections from scriptures and scholar’s articles available on **OAKS** under **RELS 205**, which students can access after they login to MyPortal (<http://myportal.cofc.edu>). Please **print out each ER article** and **bring it to class** on the day that it will be discussed, along with any required primary sources. The correct ER# for each article is listed in the syllabus and on OAKS, not on the first page of the article itself that you print out, **so please ignore the ER# written on the article’s first page if it is different from what is listed on the syllabus.**

**Class Requirements**

The course presumes no previous experience in religious studies. Its only prerequisite is the desire to read sacred texts from two Asian religions and a willingness to practice critical empathy and engage in conversation about these readings. These expectations are explicitly identified in the following points.

• **Attendance Policy and Classroom Code of Conduct**

Attendance records will be kept for each class: you are allowed **3** absences; **4** or more will negatively affect your grade. After **8** absences, the student will earn a **failing grade** for excessive absences. You are responsible for making up any absences; please get any notes on missed lectures from a classmate. Another form of disruption occurs when students arrive late or leave early; please don’t leave in the middle of class unless you absolutely must.

It is crucial that you read the **entire** assignment **before** we discuss the topic in class. This will help you understand the lectures and engage in class discussion. When there is an assignment from E-Reading material on OAKS, you should bring a printed copy to class with you, along with the books that are assigned for that day’s class. It is imperative that you have your own **physical copies** of these **texts**. Because social media and technology take one’s own and others’ attention away from class, **use of cell phones, laptops, and tablets are prohibited in class**, except in special circumstances.

• **Participation in Class (10%)**

Whatever you get out of this course is directly related to how much you put into it. Asking questions, raising concerns, and offering your own interpretations during discussions is a crucial part of this class. Please read the discussion topics on the syllabus and come to class with ideas and questions that will help us engage in meaningful discussion; you are expected to be an active participant. Grades for participation will be assigned on the basis of the quality and consistency of your involvement in class discussions.

• **Weekly Reflection Cards (15%)**

Each week you shall bring to class a thoughtful reflection related to the assigned reading for that class. The reflection should be written on a 3x5 or 5x7 card and be based on an issue that you have found puzzling, thought provoking, irritating, or interesting. Your **RC** should raise issues of interpretation or express concerns about the reading assignment. **Grades:** + = 100; √+ = 90; √ = 80; √- = 75; — = 70

• **Two 4-page Essays (Gita essay = 17.5%; Buddhacarita essay = 17.5%, or 35% total)**

These two essays each will be based upon assigned topics in relation to the texts that we examine. **Late papers are not accepted** since the essay topic will be discussed in class on the day it is due.

• **Creative Project due 3/24 (10%)**

For this project students will creatively adapt themes from the *Bhagavad Gita* or *Yoga Sutra* into a new form of media. You will write a brief creator’s statement that explains what you sought to accomplish, the sources that inform your project, and how you interpreted them. You might be inspired by the different ways that the BG and YS have been reinterpreted and performed in modern India or the West, e.g. the practice of yoga based on a new Sutra featured in the film *Kumaré: The True Story of a False Prophet*.

• **Two exams in class on 2/22 and 4/27: Midterm (15%) and Final Exam (15%)**

The exams will consist of multiple choice, short answer questions and key passages from the scriptures to identify and analyze. I will provide a **Study Guide** with vocabulary words and passages for practice.

<b>Grading Scale</b>	A	100-93 (4.0)	B-	82-80 (2.7)	D+	69-67 (1.3)
	A-	92-90 (3.7)	C+	79-77 (2.3)	D	66-63 (1.0)
	B+	89-87 (3.3)	C	77-73 (2.0)	D-	63-60 (.70)
	B	86-83 (3.0)	C-	72-70 (1.7)	F	59 and below

### Class Resources and Ethical Guidelines

I encourage you to utilize the academic support services offered by the [Writing Lab](#) for assistance in essay writing consultation: <https://cofc.sharepoint.com/sites/hub-csl>. For more information on the Center for Student Learning call **843.953.5635**. For tips on writing a Religious Studies essay, see: <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/religious-studies/>

- **Universal Learning and the SNAP program:** I am committed to the principle of universal learning. This means that our classroom, our virtual spaces, and our interactions be as inclusive as possible. Mutual respect, civility, and the ability to listen carefully are crucial to universal learning. Any student eligible for or needing accommodations because of a disability is requested to speak with me during the first two weeks of class or as soon as the student has been approved for services so that reasonable accommodations can be made. For more information on the SNAP program, see the Center for Disability Services at <http://disabilityservices.cofc.edu> or **843.953.1431**

- **Code of Conduct for this class—the renunciation of technology**

This class will be modelled on how Buddhist monks and nuns study sacred texts while at a monastery. There texts are not consumed on computers, tablets, or cell phones, but as books printed on paper. So, leave your computers, tablets, and cell phones at home and bring the assigned reading printed on pages that you can annotate in class with pen or pencil. You should also bring a notebook to class in which you can take notes on the lectures but also jot down your thoughts and responses to our class discussion. You are encouraged to put yourself on a “digital diet” and renounce attachment to social media.

- **Ethical Guidelines for behavior in class**

*Be kind.* Treat each other with the full respect and dignity each of you deserve.

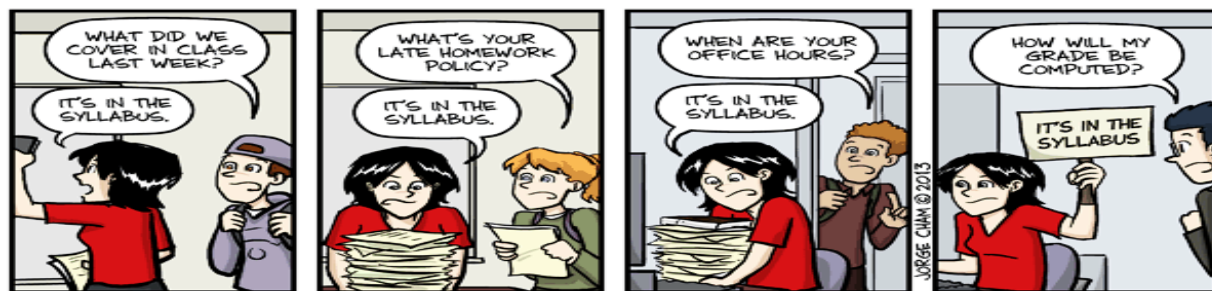
*Be patient and forgiving.* Go easy on each other. We all make mistakes. We’re all learning together.

*Be professional and help each other.* If a peer raises a question, and you know the answer, help them!

*Cite your sources.* When you are building off or borrowing from others’ ideas, give them the credit they deserve, whether it’s from a classmate or an assigned reading.

- **Generative Artificial Intelligence Policy and Academic Integrity**

Intellectual honesty is vital to an academic community and for my fair evaluation of your work. Since writing and critical thinking skills are part of the learning outcomes of this course, all writing assignments submitted in this course must be your own, completed in accordance with the University’s academic regulations. The use of Automated Writing Tools, including ChatGPT and similar artificial intelligence tools (GAI), is strictly prohibited in this course and will be considered plagiarism and a violation of Academic Integrity as outlined in the CofC Honor Code. Where I detect possible use of such tools, I will arrange to meet so you can explain your writing process behind the work. Lying, cheating, attempted cheating, and plagiarism are also violations of our Honor Code that, when suspected, are investigated. Each incident will be examined to determine the degree of deception involved. A student found responsible by the Honor Board for academic dishonesty will receive a **XF grade** in the course, indicating failure of the course due to academic dishonesty. If you are unfamiliar with the [Honor Code](#) (<https://charleston.edu/policy/documents/12.4.1.pdf>), please click on the link.



# IT'S IN THE SYLLABUS

This message brought to you by every instructor that ever lived.

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**Class Topics, Reading Assignments and Abbreviations**

The following abbreviations will be used in listing the required reading material: ER#1 refers to the first Electronic Reading available on OAKS; while RC#1 refers to the first Reflection Card assignment that responds to the assigned reading for that day. BG refers to the *Bhagavad Gita*; BGBio to *The Bhagavad Gita: A Biography*; Yoga refers to *Yoga: Discipline of Freedom*; and LoB to the *Life of the Buddha*. For a complete list of the sources of the Electronic Readings (ER#1-16) found on OAKS, see below p. 9.

**Interpretive Issues in the Study of Religious Texts: What Makes a Text “Sacred?”**

- 1/11 Course Introduction: “Reading Religion” and Controversies over Texts  
(Review this syllabus in class)
- 1/16 In the Shadow of God’s Word: What Makes a Text “Sacred?”  
(ER#1-2: Sacred Texts & Texts)  
**Discussion topics:** What makes a text “sacred?” How did the Protestant Reformation shape how we understand religions today? ER#2 contains the phrase “there is no outside-of-text;” what might this mean for scholars of religion and especially for those who study religious experience? What do the varying translations of the *Bhagavad Gita*’s quote on duty teach us? Are all interpretations of equal value?
- 1/18 Exploring Authorship & Authority: Faith in Fiction and Film  
(ER#3-4: Authorship & Is Nothing Sacred?) **RC#1 due** [Jesus Camp](#) clips on God’s Word  
**Discussion:** What is the relationship between authors, authority, and the “death of an author?” How might “reader-response theory” help us understand what binds a religious community together? What is “sacred” for Rushdie in ER#4? What does he mean when he writes that language has the “power of totemization?”
- 1/23 Reading Religiously or as Consumers: How has social media changed the way we read?  
(ER#5-6: Faking Cultural Literacy & Preface + How Religious People Read) **RC#2 due**  
**Discussion:** Do you recognize your own reading and conversational habits when you read “Faking... Literacy?” What are the primary differences between “religious” vs. “consumerist” readings of texts? Is learning to “read religiously” and to feel reverence towards a sacred text only for the faithful, or is it a necessary practice for RELS students? Why does memorization of a text enhance its religious value?
- 1/25 Myths as Textual Lenses: How do myths offer microscopes and telescopes of the world?  
(ER#7: Microscopes and Telescopes) **RC#3**  
**Discussion:** How do myths offer a way to balance the banal or everyday with the cosmic? What does Doniger mean when she argues “The myth does not demand that we accept the theological vision... its purpose is to challenge us simultaneously to see that our lives are real, and to see that they are unreal.” How might we maintain this “double vision?” Is it possible to separate theological vision from myths?



- 1/30 On Doing One's Duty: Conflicts over Hindu Family Values  
(*BGBio*: Introduction & Chapter 1, pp. 1-20; and *BG*: Chapters 1-2)  
**Discussion:** What does Richard Davis mean (in *BGBio*) by the phrase "the doubleness of the Gita?" What is Arjuna's ethical dilemma in the first two chapters? Does Krishna's teaching on Dharma and disciplined action (*karma*) resolve Arjuna's distaste for violence?
- 2/1 Yoga as Different Forms of Discipline  
(*BGBio*: Chapter 1, pp. 20-42; and *BG*: Chapters 3-6) **RC#4**  
**Discussion:** How does the Gita's location within a sprawling Mahabharata epic affect its meaning? Some say the overall plot of the Mahabharata, of which the Gita is a part, ends with the futility of all battles in that great war. If this is so, how can Krishna's argument that a just battle perpetuates cosmic order be true? Do you find Krishna's arguments that urge Arjuna to fight ethically compelling?
- 2/6 On Medieval Hindu Commentaries on the Gita: An Interpretive Battlefield?  
(*BG*: Chapters 7-9; and *BGBio*: Chapter 2, pp. 43-65)  
**Discussion:** How did the Gita become "an interpretive battlefield... for medieval theologians?" Krishna's Gita inspired the creation of *gitas* for other gods, who compete for supremacy with Krishna. Can you see how these other gods mimic or echo religious claims advanced by Krishna himself in the *Bhagavad Gita*? How does Shankara's interpretation of the Gita explain away Krishna's status as a supreme personal deity?
- 2/8 Krishna's Revelation: An Awesome and Terrifying Theophany  
(*BG*: Chapters 10-12 & ER#8: Kurukshetra in Context) **RC#5**  
**Discussion:** Robert Oppenheimer quoted from chapter 11 of the Gita when the first atomic bomb was successfully tested, saying: "Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds." How does Oppenheimer's quotation of these lines change your view of Krishna's theophany? What effect does Arjuna's vision of Krishna have on him and you as a reader? Does surrender to God justify subsequent acts of violence? Is Arjuna convinced that fighting is acceptable by Krishna's arguments or by His overpowering presence?
- 2/13 Does the *Gita* Sanction War or Promote Non-Violence?  
(*BGBio*: Chapter 4; and *BG*: Chapters 13-18) **Essay #1 due in class**  
**Essay prompt:** *What ethical values does Krishna promote when he urges Arjuna to act? Does the Gita sanction war and justify violence, or does it promote non-violence and the pursuit of peace?*

### The *Bhagavad Gita* Takes on New Clothes in the West and in Modern India



Senator Tulsi Gabbard takes the Congressional Oath of Office on the translation of the *Bhagavad Gita* by A. C. Bhaktivedanta, founder of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (or ISKCON), also known as the Hare Krishna movement. Gabbard says that in chaotic times, she finds most meaningful the Gita's message of inner peace, strength, and selfless service to others.

- 2/15 The Gita and Globalization: Colonialism in India and Transcendentalism in America  
(*BGBio* Chapter 3: Passages from India; *BG*: "Afterward") **RC#6**  
**Discussion:** How did British Colonialism inspire both the first English translation of the Gita and inform very different interpretations of its value for understanding India? Why were German Romantic thinkers and American Transcendentalists so drawn to the Gita's "primordial wisdom?" How did Vivekananda use the Gita at the World's Parliament of Religions to refute colonial claims about India? Which aspects of the *Gita* are overlooked by each of these modern interpreters, including Swami Vivekananda?

- 2/20 The Gita's Rebirth in Modern Performances: *BG* as a "Classic" and the Hindu "Bible"  
(*BGBio* Chapter 6 & Epilogue) **RC#7** clips from Peter Brook's version of *Mahabharata*  
**Discussion:** Do you think "time stands still" in the Gita? In the performances described in Chapter 6, how is the text used to justify or to critique the economic forces and effects of globalization? What features enable the Gita to become a "classic" and "global scripture" that transcends the time and place of its origin?

- 2/22 **Midterm Exam**  
(No reading, study the Midterm Study Guide)

### The *Yoga Sutra's* Philosophical Content and Its Indian Context

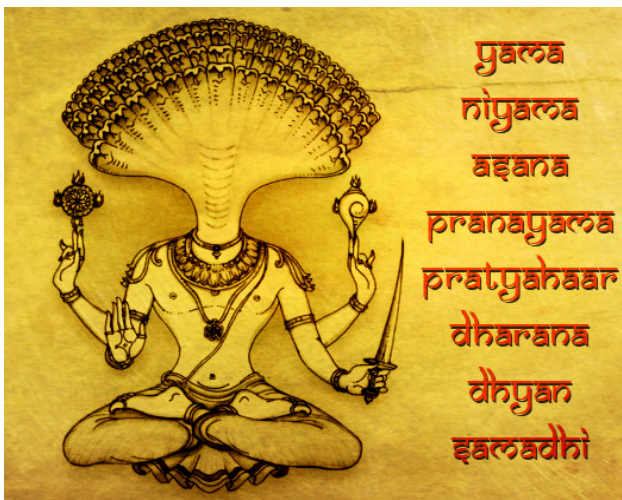
- 2/27 Introducing Patanjali's Yoga: To Catch the Mind and Keep it Still  
(ER#9: Preface & Reading the *Yoga Sutra* in the Twenty-First Century; *Yoga* pp. 1-17) **RC#8**  
**Discussion:** Why is the *Yoga Sutra* called a "comeback classic?" In ER#9 David White tells us about the many meanings of "yoga" ascribed to the *YS* and found in the *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. What surprised you most about the range of meanings? Does the classic definition presented by Patanjali (*yoga = citta + vritti + nirodha*) make sense to you? How do the many different meanings of "yoga" warn us about how hard it is "to catch the mind and keep it still?"

- 2/29 Yoga as Meditative Absorption  
(*Yoga* pp. 18-43)  
**Discussion:** What is the relationship between spirit and matter in the *YS*? How does Patanjali's analysis of the mind-body relationship reveal why people construct false identities and enslave themselves to a world of pain? How does the first chapter of the *YS* relate to the teachings about "yoga" in the *Bhagavad Gita*? How does the teaching about the independence of spirit from matter diverge from the *Gita's* karma-yoga?

- 3/1-4 **American Academy of Religion-Southeast Conference @ CofC!**

- 3/5-7 **Spring Break**

- 3/12 The Practice of Yoga: How Do the Eight Limbs of Yoga Lead to Freedom?  
(*Yoga* pp. 44-59)



**Discussion:** Before he lays out the "eight-fold limbs," Patanjali identifies the causes of suffering and ignorance; what are these causal factors and forces of corruption? Why is a "unified self" so problematic? Does the "evolution" of material nature that is described in chapter two of *YS* sound "scientific" to you?

- 3/14 Yoga and Extraordinary Mystic Power  
(*Yoga* pp. 60-73) **RC#9**  
**Discussion:** Do the extraordinary powers of the mind promised in chapter three sound "magical" and "mystical" to you, or do they seem like realistic effects of yoga practice? Are these special powers a method for "marketing" yoga practice? Do these powers make yoga seem "religious" or "superstitious?"

**Orientalism & Marketing Yoga from the Exotic East: Western Versions of the *Yoga Sutra***

- 3/19 The European Rediscovery of the *Yoga Sutra*: Orientalist Views of Yogi “Fanatics”  
(ER#10: Colebrook and the Western ‘Discovery’ of the *YS*)  
**Discussion:** How could Colebrook be so sympathetic to Yoga philosophy and yet so hostile to “fanatical” yogis? What conclusions might British Orientalists reach when they realized that there were no Indian yogis who could provide an explanation of the *Yoga Sutra*? How does their skepticism towards contemporary Hinduism yet their sympathy towards Indian classical culture betray “Orientalist” values?
- 3/21 Yoga and Consumerism: Branding and Selling Yoga  
(ER #11: Branding Yoga; watch “Become a Story Now” before class) **RC#10**  
Film clips: *Kumaré: The True Story of a False Prophet* (dir. by Vikram Gandhi, 2011)



Shri Kumaré Guiding a Meditation on the Visualization of Blue Light

**Discussion:** How does the type of yoga introduced by Vikram Gandhi’s alter-ego, Shri Kumaré, both conform to and differ from the yoga “branding” described in ER#11? How does this article and the film problematize any claim that a certain kind of yoga counts as “authentic”? Does Gandhi really “make up” a new religion? Or does he draw upon symbols, practices, and a philosophy about “illusion” that seem “Hindu?”

**3/24 Creative project due by midnight****The Story of Siddhartha: The *Buddhacarita*’s Content and Context**

- 3/26 Introducing the Buddha’s Life Story  
(ER#12: The Lifestory of the Buddha)  
**Discussion:** How does the “doubleness” of the story of the Buddha (who has god-like and human qualities) echo the “doubleness” of Krishna and the Gita? What are some of the religious consequences of Buddha’s “doubleness?” If the story of how Siddhartha Gautama becomes a Buddha does not make him a “unique” individual, why is the story so compelling for Buddhists?
- 3/28 Reading the Story of the Buddha and His Teachings as Literature  
(ER#13-13.5: Fictions of Reading and Memorizing the Buddha) **RC#11**  
**Discussion:** What are some of the “fictions of reading” that inform Western readings of Buddhist texts? Which methods of reading proposed by Flores might correct these western misunderstandings? What role does desire play in how westerners have interpreted the Buddha’s story?
- 4/2 Introducing the *Buddhacarita*: Siddhartha’s Birth and Youth  
(LoB, “Introduction” pp. xvii-xxx; Cantos 1-2)  
**Discussion:** According to the translator’s “Introduction,” how does the story of Buddha correspond to the Brahmanic tradition of Hinduism? Does this correspondence remind you of the relationship between Jesus in the “New Testament” and the Judaism of the “Old Testament?” How is the birth and youth of Siddhartha similar to yet different from the birth and youth of Jesus?
- 4/4 Life Lessons about Love, Old Age, Sickness & Death: Palace Life and Departure  
(LoB, Cantos 3-5) **RC#12** Clips from film *The Little Buddha*  
**Discussion:** How do the gods intervene in the story of Siddhartha’s trips outside the palace? How might

their role in the story affect how a pious Buddhist would understand Siddhartha? Is Siddhartha’s naiveté about old age, sickness, and death compatible with how prescient he seems at birth, when he declares “for Awakening I am born” (1.15)? Why does Ashvaghosha spend so much time describing the erotic flirtation of the courtesans in chapter four only to describe their states of dishevelment when Siddhartha leaves the palace? Is this view of women misogynistic?

- 4/9 **Becoming a Renunciant: Does Siddhartha’s Asceticism Violate Hindu Family Values?** (LoB, Cantos 6-8)

**Discussion:** How does Siddhartha justify his quest to become a renunciant to his friend Chandaka? Does Siddhartha violate the Hindu value of Dharma? Can the pain and suffering that Siddhartha brings to this wife Yashodhara and his step-mother Gautami when he abandons them be justified, or is his ascetic quest for enlightenment selfish?

- 4/11 **Siddhartha’s New-Found Dharma Versus the Dharma of Vedic Scriptures & Brahmanic Tradition** (LoB, “Introduction” pp. xxxi-li; Cantos 9 & 12) **RC#13** Clips from film *The Little Buddha*

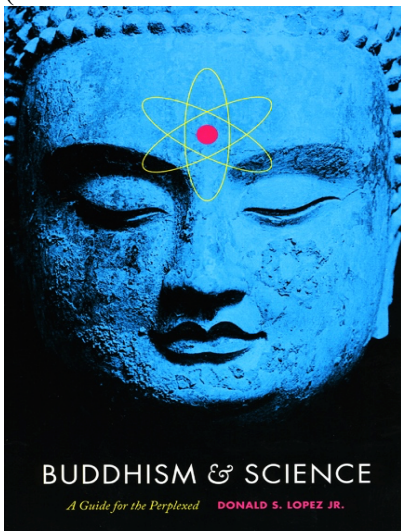
**Discussion:** After reading the translator’s comments about competing forms of Dharma in the Introduction, how many types of Dharma can you discern in Cantos 8-9? When Siddhartha meets the sage-ascetic Arada in canto 12, how does Arada’s philosophy echo what we’ve studied in the *Yoga Sutra*? We see Siddhartha attain blissful states of trance but he remains dissatisfied with these experiences. What does this tell us about what matters most to him in his quest for enlightenment?

- 4/16 **Becoming Buddha: The Conquest of Mara and Enlightenment** (LoB, Cantos 13-14)

**Discussion:** What similarities and differences emerge when you compare Siddhartha’s battle with Mara and Krishna’s theophany in the Gita? What enables Siddhartha to defeat Mara? What might this battle represent as an allegory? On the eve of his enlightenment, what realizations does Siddhartha reach about Samsara during the three watches of the night?

- 4/17 **Essay on *Buddhacarita* due on OAKS by midnight. Essay prompt:** *How does Siddhartha’s “doubleness” (as both human & supermundane) inform how Ashvaghosha tells his story in Buddhacarita? What different doctrinal, ethical, and social values become evident when you analyze the specific elements in Siddhartha’s story? How do conflicting views about “Dharma” emerge?*

- 4/18 **Birth of the Scientific Buddha** (ER#14-15: “The Scientific Buddha” and “Birth of the Scientific Buddha”) **RC#14**



**Discussion:** What does the gradual European discovery of the Buddha and the religion of Buddhism teach us? Why did the West invent a “scientific Buddha?” Why do so many people in the west hope that Buddhism will be compatible with science?

**4/23 Death of the Scientific Buddha** (ER#16: “Death of the Scientific Buddha”) **RC#15**  
**Discussion:** Does Lopez’s claim that the western encounter with Buddhism is a “series of moments of misrecognition” make sense to you now? How is Buddhist meditation not like modern stress-reduction meditation? How do the teachings ascribed to the Buddha serve as radical challenges to our current worldview?

- 4/27 **Final Exam on Saturday April 27 at 1:00 pm in Bell 400**



**Sources for Electronic Readings (ER#1-16) on OAKS**

1. Michael D. Swartz, "Sacred Texts" in *Religion: Narrating Religion* ed. by Sarah Iles Johnston. Farmington Hills, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2017) pp. 3-16.
2. Malory Nye, "Texts" from *Religion: The Basics*. New York: Routledge, 2003, pp. 149-163.
3. Malory Nye, "Authorship" from *Religion: The Basics*, pp. 163-175.
4. Salman Rushdie, "Is Nothing Sacred?" from *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*. London: Granta Books, 1991, pp. 415-429.
5. Karl Taro Greenfeld, "Faking Cultural Literacy" from *New York Times* Op-Ed article (May 24, 2014): <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/25/opinion/sunday/faking-cultural-literacy.html>
6. Paul Griffiths, "Preface," "How Religious People Read," and "Conclusion" from *Religious Reading: The Place of Reading in the Practice of Religion*. Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. ix-x, 40-49, 182-188.
7. Wendy Doniger, "Microscopes and Telescopes" from her *The Implied Spider: Politics and Theology in Myth*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998, pp. 7-25.
8. Steven Rosen, "Kurukshetra in Context" from *Holy War: Violence and the Bhagavad Gita* ed. by Steven J. Rosen. Hampton VA: Deepak Heritage Books, 2002, pp. 9-33.
9. David Gordon White, "Preface" and "Reading the *Yoga Sutra* in the Twenty-First Century" in *The Yoga Sutra of Patanjali: A Biography*. Princeton University Press, 2014, pp. xv-17.
10. David Gordon White, Chapters 3-4 in *The Yoga Sutra of Patanjali: A Biography*, pp. 53-91.
11. Andrea R. Jain, "Branding Yoga" from her *Selling Yoga: From Counterculture to Pop Culture*. Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 73-94.
12. John S. Strong, "The Lifestory of the Buddha" from *Religion: Narrating Religion* ed. by Sarah Iles Johnston. Farmington Hills, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2017, pp. 209-226.
13. Ralph Flores, "Fictions of Reading: Westerners and Buddhist Texts" from his *Buddhist Scriptures as Literature: Sacred Rhetoric and the Use of Theory*. SUNY Press, 2008, pp. 1-16.
- 13.5 Keith Heller, "Memorizing the Buddha" from *Nixon Under the Bodhi Tree and Other Works of Buddhist Fiction*, ed. by Kate Wheeler. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2004), pp. pp. 149-166.
14. Donald S. Lopez. "The Scientific Buddha: Why Do We Ask that Buddhism Be Compatible with Science?" in *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review* (Winter 2012), pp. 64-69, 110.
15. Donald S. Lopez. "The Birth of the Scientific Buddha" in *The Scientific Buddha: His Short and Happy Life*. Yale University Press, 2012, pp. 21-46.
16. Donald S. Lopez. "The Death of the Scientific Buddha" in *The Scientific Buddha*, pp. 101-132.

### Gaining literacy in Hindu and Buddhist Sacred Texts from India

The study of sacred texts in religions like Hinduism and Buddhism is a lot like studying a foreign language: gaining “religious literacy” occurs after acquiring a new vocabulary for key terms. Below are terms that you need to know to do well on the exams. Keep this list handy as you read the assignments and write down their meanings.



#### Terms used in the study of sacred texts

Canon, “sacred” features of texts, I-Thou relationship, exegesis, hermeneutics  
 Becky Fisher/*Jesus Camp*, power of God’s Word, Salman Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses*  
 Authors and authority, “there is no outside-of-text,” religion as *religare vs. relegere*  
 Consumerist reading vs. religious reading, sacred books as something to eat, savor, digest  
 Myth as microscope vs. telescope, theological vs. political lenses, homology, allegory  
 Pluralism vs. monism, transcendence vs. immanence, exoteric vs esoteric

#### Hindu terms

*Upanishads*, Sanskrit, guru, samsara, karma, maya, Atman = Brahman, moksha, asceticism, yoga Vedas,  
*Purusha-Sukta*, ritual sacrifice, Dharma, 4 Castes, *Mahabharata*, Kauravas vs. Pandavas  
 Arjuna’s dilemma, *kshatriya*, field of Dharma, Disciplines of Action/Knowledge/Devotion  
 “Doubleness” of Krishna, avatara, maya, Vishnu, puja vs. asceticism, sacrifice, renunciation  
 Krishna’s theophany, numinous experience, cosmic purge, just war doctrine, *ahimsa*  
 Patanjali, etymology of “yoga,” yoga = *citta + vritti + nirodha*  
 Samkhya dualism, Purusha vs. Prakriti, isolation and discrimination, reified concepts  
 8 limbs of yoga, extraordinary powers, “fanatical yogis,” yoga and science, Vivekananda  
 Pizza effect, “branding yoga,” Shri Kumare’s “invented yoga,” meditation on the blue light  
*Laws of Manu*, Four Stages of Life, *Dharma/Artha/Kama*, forest as liminal place, sannyasin

#### Buddhist Terms

Ashvagosha, *Buddhacarita*, hagiography, demythologization, sacred hyperbole, supercessionism  
 Siddhartha, Gautama, bodhisattva, Shakyamuni, Jina, “Historical Buddha,” *Jatakas*  
 Miracle birth, *Cakravartin* vs. Buddha prophecy, Asita, Shuddhodana, 3 Sights, *deus ex machina*  
 4th sight, altruistic compassion, palace as allegory, ascetic misogyny, Great Departure, Chandaka  
 Dharma of cessation vs. heavenly rebirth, Buddha’s teaching career, Yashodhara, Rahula, Gautami  
 Arada, Samkhya, Field-Knower/Atman, trance states, Jainism, oneupmanship, Middle Way  
 Mara & Kama, 3 Watches of night, karmic history, No-Self, cosmology, hell realms, Awakening

### About Me...

I grew up on the west coast in beautiful Santa Barbara California, went to Reed College in Portland Oregon (where I majored in religion), earned a MA degree in religious studies at UC Santa Barbara, before I moved to Ann Arbor Michigan to pursue degrees in Buddhist Studies (I have a PhD in B.S!). Since graduating from college, I have spent many years living in Buddhist monasteries and traveling throughout India, especially in the Himalayas of North India. Over the last dozen years, I have led CofC students to Northern India to study how the religions of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam are adapting to modernity and globalization. When not at work, I enjoy watching sports (especially CofC basketball games—go Cougs!), biking, canoeing, and hiking in the mountains, and going on long road trips in the South, in the Pacific Northwest, and in western Canada.

I joined the Department of Religious Studies at CofC in 1999, when I was hired to teach courses in Asian religions (Buddhism, Religion and Society in India and Tibet, Religions of China and Japan, Hinduism, Sacred Texts of the East, Tibetan Buddhism). But I also teach thematic courses on “Religion, Art & Culture,” “Religion and Globalization,” and “Religion and Violence.”

I believe that learning about different religions should be an intellectual adventure that engages the imagination, and I have chosen reading material and films that I hope you will find fascinating. I expect students to come prepared and make meaningful contributions to our class discussions. If you are experiencing challenges that make it difficult for you to do so, I encourage you to meet with me privately so that we can work together to develop a solution.



Introducing CofC students to the Buddhist Wheel of Life in Ladakh, North India, 2016