

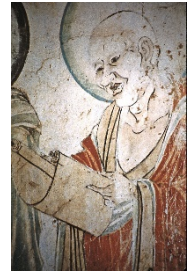
# READINGS in ASIAN RELIGIOUS TEXTS

RELIGIOUS STUDIES 216, Spring 2021

Professor Todd T. Lewis

Office Hours: Mondays 6-7 PM, Wed 7-8:30, Thurs. 7-8 and by appointment

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## Course Description:

This seminar gives students a chance to read and critically analyze classic sacred writings in translation from the South Asian traditions, Hinduism and Buddhism. The genres sampled will include a hymns, ritual texts, ascetic mysticism, biography, popular narrative, and scholastic treatises. We will also consider the cross-cultural definition of “text,” hermeneutical approaches to exegesis, the idea of a “scriptural canon,” and the construction of “text” in the western historical imagination.

## Required Textbooks:

Bhikkhu Bodhi, *Early Buddhist Discourses*. Hackett, 2006.

Patrick Olivelle, trans *The Life of Buddha by Ashvaghosa*. NY: NYU Press, 2008.

K. Schaeffer, trans. *Tenzin Chogyel's Life of the Buddha*. NY: Penguin, 2015.

Peter Khoroch, trans. *Once a Peacock, Once an Actress*. Chicago University Press, 2017.

Jeffrey Hopkins, *Nagarjuna's Precious Garland*. Ithaca: Snow Lion, 2007.

Red Pine, *The Diamond Sutra*. Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2002.

H. Kern, *The Lotus Sutra - Saddharma-Pundarika: The Lotus of the True Law*.

J.J. Jones, trans. *The Mahavastu*, Vol. II. 1952

Edwin Arnold, *The Light of Asia [MCR]*

Readings posted on the course's Moodle website “[MCR]”

All the books above have been ordered from the Holy Cross bookstore.

## Course Design and Expectations:

This course is designed to give us a chance to carefully read, analyze, and discuss central texts in the history of the two great world religions in South Asia. Joining the class entails the expectation that members will complete reading assignments in preparation for class, lead discussions of assigned topics, engage with the material, and take an active role in class discussions. Course assignments will entail the freedom for individuals to explore topics, themes, and genres of personal interest.

**Weekly Course Posting.** Each student once a week – by 3 pm Thursday – will submit three sentences regarding that day's textual reading under the Moodle heading DISCUSSION FORUMS (at the top of the web page). A new Seminar Discussion heading with the date will be posted weekly, where every student should make this posting every week. These weekly commentary will provide a portion of the “Class Participation” grade.

The first two sentences should refer to specific passages from the reading (include page numbers) that cite major points in the text. The third sentence should pose a question for the seminar to consider.

## Course Requirements/Grading:

*Separate guidelines for these will be posted.*

1. Commentary on text to be discussed in class	10 pts
2. Term Research Paper on Text (8-10 pages)	25
3. Weekly Text Points and Questions	25
4. Oral Final Exam	25
5. Participation	<u>15</u>
	100 pts



## Lecture Topics and Reading Assignments

### INTRODUCTORY

#### 1. 2/4: Syllabi and Course Overview

**“Religious Tradition”; Texts & Contexts; Exegesis and Hermeneutics**

Required Reading:

“Asian Scriptures among the World’s Religions” [MCR]

“Shikar” from Ed Dimock, *Mr. Dimock Explores the Mysteries of the East* [MCR]

#### 2. 2/11: Thinking about Texts & Contexts: A Discussion with Ellen Coon

Required Reading:

Ronald Inden, “Textualizing History, Historicizing Texts,” in *Querying the Medieval: Texts and the History of Practices in South Asia* [MCR]

Ellen Coon, “Dil Maya Aji: Narratives of a traditional midwife in Kathmandu” [MCR]

### TOPIC 1:

### Ancient and Formative Hindu Scriptures

#### 3. 2/18: Sanskrit, Veda, Upanishadic Mysticism

Required Reading:

“Hymn to Agni,” “Hymn to Indra,” [MCR]

“Katha Upanishad” [MCR]

#### 4. 2/25: Brahmanical Ritual Text: *Atharva Veda*

Required Reading:

*Atharva Veda* [MCR]



TOPIC TWO:  
Texts on the Life of the Buddha

**5. 3/4: Siddhārtha: Birth, Youth, Marriage, Renunciation**

Required Reading:

Patrick Olivelle, trans. *The Life of Buddha by Ashvaghosa*, 1-242

*Tenzin Chogyel's Life of the Buddha*, 1-80

Edwin Arnold, *Light of Asia* [MCR]

**6. 3/11: Shākyamuni: Enlightenment Teaching, *Parinirvāna* (*Parinibbāna*)**

Required Reading:

Patrick Olivelle, *The Life of Buddha by Ashvaghosa*, 243-432

*Tenzin Chogyel's Life of the Buddha*, 1-80

Edwin Arnold, *Light of Asia* [MCR]





**TOPIC THREE:**  
**Early Buddhist Texts**

**7. 3/18: Pali Canon Texts I: *Sutta Aggañña* and Essential Doctrines**

Required Reading:

Steven Collins, trans. "The Discourse on What is Primary" [MCR]  
Bhikkhu Bodhi, *Early Buddhist Discourses*. Hackett, 2006.

**8. 3/25: Pali Canon Texts II: Doctrinal Texts**

Required Reading:

Bhikkhu Bodhi, *Early Buddhist Discourses*. Hackett, 2006

**4/1: EASTER BREAK, NO CLASS**



**TOPIC FOUR:**  
***Jātakas* and *Avadānas*: Former Lives of the Buddha**

**9. 4/8: *Rasa* and the *Kāvya* Tradition**  
**Jatakas: Parables and Karma Stories as Buddhist Genre**

Required Reading:

A. Greely, "Because of the Stories" [MCR]  
P. Khoroché, *Once a Peacock, Once an Actress*. (Haribhatta's *Garland of Jatakas*), All: 1-10;  
Individual Assigned Story 11-34





TOPIC FIVE:

Texts of Mahāyāna Buddhism: Earning *Punya*, Cultivating *Prajñā*

10. 4/15: Overview of Mahāyāna Traditions; Popular Buddhist Stories

Required Reading:

*Mahāvastu* [MCR]: All, 1-133; 242-253 +

Text Assigned to each seminar member from the *Mahāvastu*



11. 4/22: *The Lotus Sutra*

Required Reading:

H. Kern, *The Lotus Sutra - Saddharma-Pundarika*.



12. 4/29: A *Prajñāpāramitā* Text: Pointing to Salvific Insight; The Dharma of Ritual Texts

Required Reading:

Red Pine, *The Diamond Sutra*, with Commentary.

The *Pancaraksba* [MCR]



13. 5/6: Buddhist Epistle: Advice from Nāgārjuna's *The Precious Garland*  
Reading Hindu Devotional Poetry from the Tamil, with Maire White

Required Reading:

*Buddhist Advice for Living and Liberation: Nagarjuna's Precious Garland.*



Elaine Craddock, trans. *Siva's Demon Devotee: Karaikkal Ammaiyar* [MCR]

J. Hawley, "The Bhakti Movement and its Discontents" [MCR]

TOPIC SIX:  
Term Studies

**TBD: Presentation of Final Essays; Reflections and Reconsiderations**

**EXAM PERIOD: INDIVIDUAL ORAL FINAL**