

## **Death and Afterlife**

REL 3938

Summer A 2014

**Instructor:** Vasudha Narayanan

**Email:** vasu@ufl.edu

**Teaching Assistant:** Bhakti Mamtora

**Email:** bhaktim@ufl.edu

**Course Location:** Online Course, Canvas: <https://lss.at.ufl.edu/>

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### **Course Description**

This course is divided into two sections, all of which examine conceptions of death and the afterlife. The first and largest section examines conceptions of death and the afterlife from the perspective of various religious traditions from around the world. Topics that will be explored in this section include: conceptions of a soul (if any), what happens to a person at death, funerary rites, various conceptions of a/the ultimate reality (theistic, monistic, and so forth), notions of salvation and/or liberation, judgment, and various conceptions time (e.g., linear or cyclical). The second section will explore how some of these religious perspectives are reflected in popular culture and spiritual movements. This section will focus on views of reincarnation and debates over the topic of near-death experiences.

### **Course Objectives**

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Upon successful completion of this course the student will be able to:

- Provide a background for each religious tradition to contextualize notions of death and the afterlife.
  - Recognize basic conceptions of death and the afterlife according various Western and Eastern religious traditions (Hindu, Buddhist, Chinese, Japanese Indigenous, Christian, Judaic, and Islamic traditions) as exemplified through sacred texts (written or oral), ritual practices and popular beliefs.
  - Identify a few funerary practices associated with different religious traditions.
  - Understand relationships between conceptions of death and the afterlife and key doctrinal positions maintained by the respective religious tradition.
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### Optional Texts

Bregman, Lucy ed. *Death & Dying in World Religions*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hut Publishing, 2009.

Note: All required reading materials for this course will be made available in electronic format (e.g., .pdf files, .doc files, web links, etc.) on Canvas: <https://lss.at.ufl.edu/>

### Grading Breakdown

Quizzes: 40%  
Discussion Reflection/Response Postings: 20%  
Two Reflection Papers: 20% (10% each)  
Final Exam: 20%

### Evaluation

Grades will be computed based on the percentages given above according to the following grading scale:

A: 100-93	A-: 92-90	
B+: 89-87	B: 86-83	B-: 82-80
C+: 79-77	C: 76-73	C-: 72-70
D+: 69-67	D: 66-63	D-: 62-60
E: 59 or below		

For more information about UF's minus grade system visit:

<http://www.isis.ufl.edu/minusgrades.html>

### Quizzes

This course will conduct weekly online quizzes to evaluate the student's grasp and understanding of concepts, facts, arguments, and other important information covered in the lectures and readings presented during that particular week. Before taking a quiz, students should have watched all the videos and completed the required readings for the week. All quizzes will be administered online through the Canvas website. All quizzes will be made available for two days beginning on Thursday. The quizzes will be made available **6:00 am Thursday morning**; the student will have **until 9:00 pm the Friday** of the same week to take the quiz. Unless otherwise stated the quizzes will be eight minutes. You will be notified in advance in case any changes are made concerning the time. Questions will be randomly generated from a pool predetermined questions which ensures that no two students have the same exact quiz. This procedure is necessary in an online class in order to discourage cheating. These quizzes will comprise 40% of your overall grade for the course. For further information on taking quizzes in -Canvas please consult the online help files.

### **Online Discussion Postings**

Every week students are expected to submit **two** posts to the online course forums in Canvas. **Each of these required posts must be at least 100 words in length.** These forums are only available to the instructors and other students enrolled in the course. **The first post** must be an independent post initiated by the student in the forums. This independent post should be a reflection/response to the course readings and/or lectures required for that week. The student should feel free to compose a post on a topic draw from the course's weekly material that most interests him or her. A few example topics will be made available to students should selecting a topic prove too difficult. **The first independent post is due at 5:00 pm on Wednesday.** In order to facilitate discussion among fellow students **the second required post** must be composed in response to another student's post on the readings/lectures from that week (i.e., a response post) For credit, the weekly posts must be made by **Thursday 5:00 pm**, unless informed otherwise. Students are encouraged to upload their posts well in advance of this deadline so that other students can engage with your comments and observations for the required response post. All posts should be articulate and well-considered. Posts should also adhere to the rules of English grammar, punctuation and spelling. Although only two posts are required, students are encouraged to make additional (relevant) posts in order to facilitate further discussion with your classmates. Additional posts beyond the two required posts can be of any length. All posts should be courteous, academic and non-aggressive. Rude and demeaning online behavior will not be tolerated for any reason and could adversely affect your grade. While students may certainly be critical, such critical responses and observations should be presented in a professional and academic manner. These discussion posts will comprise 20% of your overall grade for the course.

### **Reflection Papers**

This course will require you to write two 5-page reflection papers. For each paper, you will be provided with a general topic by your instructor. Students are expected to write about this topic by drawing upon their course readings, lectures and discussions. The papers should be double-spaced and have 1-inch page margins. The font should be 12pt Times New Roman (or Calibri). The first reflection paper will be **due 6/2/2014 by 5:00 pm**. The second reflection paper will be **due 6/16/2014 by 5:00 pm**. Additional details are provided online via Canvas. Students are encouraged to start working on these paper assignments early. Each reflection paper will comprise 10% of your overall grade for the course (total 20%).

### **Final Exam**

This final exam for this course will be administered via Canvas. The exam will be cumulative, and the questions will consist of a mixture of multiple choice, true/false, matching and so forth. Like quizzes, the final exam will be timed and the date will be announced well in advance. The final exam will comprise 20% of your overall grade for the course. **The Final exam will become available on 6/16/2014 at 12:00 am and will remain available until 9:00 pm on 6/19/2014.** Once started, students will have 45 minutes to complete the final exam.

### **Attendance**

This course is completely online and there are no in-person meetings for lectures or exams. All course activities will be conducted via Canvas (<https://lss.at.ufl.edu/>).

### **Academic Honesty**

Guidelines for academic honesty at the University of Florida can be found at: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcode.php>

Students are expected to familiarize themselves with the guidelines detailed at the above site and related links and adhere to them.

### **Online Behavior**

Students are expected to be courteous to the instructor and other students in the class. Rude and demeaning online behavior will not be tolerated and could adversely affect a student's grade. All posts, emails and other forms of electronic correspondence should be courteous and professional.

Although the course is online, the University's honor and conduct codes still apply:

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/>

### **Students with Disabilities**

Any student with a disability must register with the office of the Dean of Students:

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>

### **Tentative Course Schedule** (subject to modification)

### **Conceptions of Death & Afterlife in Religious Traditions of the World**

#### Eastern Religious Traditions

#### **Week 1** (5/13 – 5/18): Course Introduction and Hindu Traditions

##### Section 1: Course Introduction

Introduction Video:

Welcome & Introduction by Dr. Vasudha Narayanan

Additional Video:

The Afterlife (PBS) — <http://video.pbs.org/video/1688149554/>

##### **Required Readings:**

Moore & Williamson, "The Universal Fear of Death and the Cultural Response," pp. 3–12 (online .pdf)

Bregman, Introduction, pp. ix–xiii (course textbook)

##### Section 2: Hindu Traditions

Video Lectures:

Hinduism – Part 1, Vasudha Narayanan

Hinduism – Part 2, Vasudha Narayanan

Hinduism – Part 3, Vasudha Narayanan

##### **Required Readings:**

Murata, "Grieving Tradition in a New Land: Hindu Death and Dying Rituals in America," pp. 127–48 (online .pdf)

#### **Week 2** (5/19 – 5/25): Buddhist & East Asian Traditions

##### Section 1: Buddhist Traditions

Video Lectures:

Buddhism: Death & Rebirth, Phillip Green  
Buddhist Stupas (Harn Talk), Phillip Green  
Bodhisattvas (Harn Talk), Allysa Peyton

**Required Readings:**

Bregman, Chapters 8, pp. 105–117 (course textbook)  
Strong, “The Death and Parinirvana of the Buddha” and “The  
Distribution of the Relics,” pp. 45–49 (online .pdf)  
Strong, “Introduction: Relics of the Buddha,” pp. 1–20 (online .pdf)

Section 2: East Asian Traditions of China & Japan

Video Lectures:

Notions of Death and the Afterlife in China, Kendall Marchman  
Mizukokuyo Case Study, Jason Purvis

**Required Readings:**

Bregman, Chapter 9 & 10, pp. 119–52 (course textbook)

Indigenous Traditions

**Week 3 (5/26 – 6/1): Indigenous Traditions**

Video Lectures:

Indigenous Traditions, Robin Wright  
Religions in Andean Region (Harn Talk), Maya Stanfield Mazzi  
Exhibits from the Kongo (Harn Talk), Robin Poynor

Additional Video:

Life that Doesn't End with Death, Kelli Swazey (Tedtalks) –  
[http://www.ted.com/talks/kelli\\_swazey\\_life\\_that\\_doesn\\_t\\_end\\_with\\_de  
ath.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelli_swazey_life_that_doesn_t_end_with_death.html)

**Required Readings:**

Bregman, Chapter 11, pp. 153–67 (course textbook)

Western Religious Traditions

**Week 4 (6/2 – 6/8): Christian Traditions**

Video Lectures:

Death and the Afterlife in Christianity, Dan Johnson  
Death and the Afterlife in Renaissance Italy, Elizabeth Ross  
Controversies Concerning Hell, Sean O’Neil

*Optional Video:*

Heaven & Hell (PBS) – <http://video.pbs.org/video/2047528824/>

**Required Readings:**

Bregman, Chapters 4 & 5, pp. 43–76 (course textbook)  
[Holten, "Hell and the Goodness of God"](#)  
[Editors of ChristianHistory.net, "What did Luther actually say in the 95 Theses that sparked the Protestant Reformation"](#)  
[Gin, "Why the Hell Does Hell Still Matter?"](#)  
[Interview with Rob Bell, "Hell, in Rob Bell's Own Words: State of Belief Radio"](#)

*Optional Reading:*

[Q&A: Francis Chan on Rob Bell and Hell](#)

## **Week 5 (6/9 – 6/15): Jewish & Islamic Traditions**

### Section 1: Judaism

Video Lecture:

Judaism: Death & Afterlife, Rabbi David Kaiman

#### **Required Readings:**

Bregman, Chapter 3, pp. 29–42 (course textbook)  
Rabbi Elie Kaplan Spitz, *Does the Soul Survive? A Jewish Journey to Belief in the Afterlife, Past Lives and Living with Purpose*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Light Publishing, 2001. Pp. 33-39 and 81-101.

### Section 2: Islam

Video Lecture:

Death and Dying in Islam, Zoharah Simmons

#### **Required Readings:**

Bregman, Chapter 6, pp. 77–90 (course textbook)

## **Death & the Afterlife in Pop Culture, Spirituality, and New Age Movements**

### **Week 6 (6/16 – 6/21): Reincarnation & Death & Afterlife in (Pop) Culture**

#### Section 1: Reincarnation

Video:

In Another Life: Reincarnation in America

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7mKGdK\\_JCcU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7mKGdK_JCcU)

#### **Required Readings:**

Weiss, *Many Lives, Many Masters*, pp. 9–59 (online .pdf excerpts of preface and chapters 1–3)

[Opposing Viewpoint Essay: Death & Dying \(online .pdf\)](#)

- Shroder, “Reincarnation May Lead to Life After Death,” pp. 190–200

## Section 2: The Afterlife in Contemporary Culture

### Video:

Interview with Professor Louis Ritz, Department of Neuroscience,  
University of Florida on Consciousness, NDE, and Meditation

### Required Readings:

Kraemer, “What Happens When You Die,” pp. 159–86 (online .pdf)

Moreman, “Evidence for Life after Death, an overview of the debate,” pp. 209–36 (online .pdf)

Alexander, “Proof of Heaven: A Doctor’s Experience With the Afterlife,” <http://www.newsweek.com/proof-heaven-doctors-experience-afterlife-65327>

### Opposing Viewpoint Essays: Death & Dying (online .pdfs)

- Smith, “There Is an Afterlife,” pp. 157–64
- Kurtz, “There Is No Afterlife,” pp. 165–73
- Sharp, “Near-Death Experiences Are Glimpses of the Afterlife,” pp. 149–54
- Ebborn, Mulligan and Beyerstein, “Near-Death Experiences Are Not Glimpses of an Afterlife,” pp. 163–68

### *Optional Opposing Viewpoints Readings:*

- Seidman, “Near-Death Experiences Have Natural, Not Spiritual, Causes,” pp. 182–89
- Ring, “Near-Death Experiences May Be Glimpses of an Afterlife,” pp. 174–81
- Groothuis, “Near-Death Experiences May Not Be Glimpses of the Afterlife,” pp. 155–62

**Final Exam: The Final exam will become available on 6/16/2014 at 12:00 am and will remain available until 9:00 pm on 6/19/2014.**