

## RLG 6935 "Seminar on Sacred Texts Spring Term 2017

### SYLLABUS

#### Class dates

9th January TP  
16th January MLK  
23 January TVP  
30 January TVP  
6 February TVP  
13 February SV  
20 February SV  
27 February SV  
6 March SH  
13 March Spring Break  
20 March SH  
27 March IA  
3 April IA  
10 April AMB (erev Pesah)  
17 April AMB (Easter Monday)  
24 April AMB/TVP

**This course will examine the way various religious and spiritual traditions deal with the question of blood and tradition. This wide-ranging course will move from Judaism to the lyrics of Bob Dylan and from the Christian sacrament and trans-substantiation to questions of caste and identity in Eastern religions and Islam.**



*A postcard in Yiddish commemorating the verdict in the 1913 trial of Mendel Beilis, a Jew charged with the ritual religious killing of a Christian child in Kiev. The jury acquitted Beilis but judged that the crime had occurred. Tsar Nicholas II (center) is bidding Beilis to go free—‘but I won’t waste any time in getting even for your acquittal with your Russian brothers you’ve left behind.’ The seated old man depicts the ‘Jewish people’; the ball and chain is labeled ‘blood libel.’*

1. Introduction to the Study of Judaism and its texts
2. Blood in the Bible and Talmud
3. Blood in Jewish History: The Blood Libel
4. Blood, religion and Race: the case of the Jews.

#### Readings

Start with this very short film:  
<http://www.oprah.com/belief/introduction-to-judaism>

The Hebrew Bible: King James translation

The Essential Talmud, Adin Steinsaltz, Basic Books (Hardcover)  
(Paperback) (Kindle)

Read <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2016/10/27/first-blood-libel-against-jews/>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3543766/>

## SECTION TWO: PROFESSOR STEVEN VOSE

### Caste and Status in Indian Sacred Literature

**Books to Purchase:** 1) *The Laws of Manu*, translated by Wendy Doniger and Brian K. Smith (Penguin Classics, 1992). ISBN: 9780140445404

2) R. K. Narayan, *The Mahābhārata: A Shortened Modern Prose Version of the Indian Epic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013). ISBN: 9780226051659

**Unit Title:** Caste, Blood, Nobility, and Status in the Indian *Imaginaire* from the Vedas to the *Mahābhārata*

Week 1: The Birth of Caste in the Sacrifice; Caste Rules and Laws in *The Laws of Manu*

Reading: 1) *Rig Veda*, 10.90: The Sacrifice of the Man (*Puruṣa-Sūkta*) (Bb)

2) *The Laws of Manu*: Introduction (pp. xv-lxi);

Ch. 1: pp. 3-9 (vv. 1-57, esp. 31-34), 12-14 (vv. 87-110);

Ch. 2: pp. 20-22 (vv. 30-47), 33-35 (vv. 154-172);

Ch. 3: pp. 43-45 (vv. 1-19), 68-69 (vv. 236-250);

Ch. 4: pp. 74-76 (vv. 1-20), 79-80 (vv. 53-66), 81-82 (vv. 79-91), 89-90 (vv. 162-178), 93-95 (vv. 205-228), 96-98 (vv. 244-260);

Ch. 5: 99-104 (vv. 1-49), 108-09 (vv. 81-92), 113-14 (vv. 127-35), 115-16 (vv. 147-69);

Ch. 6: pp. 117 (vv. 1-4), 120-21 (vv. 33-41), 126-27 (vv. 87-97);

Ch. 7: pp. 128-31 (vv. 1-35), 135-36 (v. 69), 142 (v. 133-140);

Ch. 8: pp. 152-54 (vv. 1-22), 155-56 (vv. 35-46), 157-68 (vv. 61-130, 139-50), 171-72 (vv. 169-79), 175-76 (vv. 206-17), 181-83 (vv. 267-84), 188-93 (vv. 344-87), 195-96 (vv. 410-18);

Ch. 9: pp. 197-98 (vv. 1-18), 200-01 (vv. 32-40), 204-09 (vv. 64-102), 223-25 (vv. 235-49), 230-33 (vv. 313-36);  
Ch. 10: pp. 234-50 (vv. 1-131);\*  
Ch. 11: pp. 252-53 (vv. 18-26), 256-59 (vv. 55-90), 261-62 (vv. 104-07), 263-65 (vv. 127-40), 267-68 (vv. 170-79), 271 (vv. 205-10), 276-77 (vv. 262-66) (Bb)

3) Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism*, pp. 10-14, 20-22, 30-40, 44-50, 52-65 (Bb)

Questions: *Rig Veda*: What is the connection between the creation of the world and the creation of the caste order in *Rig Veda* 10.90? What does this imply about human difference? What might it imply about human duty?  
*Manu*: What is the relationship between the universal and the particular in Manu's conception of *dharma*? How does *Manu* delineate a person's duty? What does this imply about how humans are imagined in this text? Why does *Manu* discuss food so much? What do you make of the differences in punishments for crimes committed by and against members of different castes? Which is the most protected caste in the text and what does this imply about the text's *raison d'être*? \*Why do you think *Manu* goes to great lengths to create names for mixed-caste people? What do you make of this text as a "law code"? (Note: "twice-born" refers to a person of the upper three castes: Brahmins [Priests], Kṣatriyas [Warriors], and Vaiśyas [Commoners].)

Flood: This reading is provided to give you background, chronology and context for the primary source readings and to connect the Vedas and *Manu*. It may be read first or last.

Week 2: Nobility, Status and Blood Relation in the *Mahābhārata*

Reading: 1) R. K. Narayan, *The Mahābhārata: A Shortened Modern Prose Version of the Indian Epic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

2) The Stories of Kṛpa, Droṇa, and Ekalavya from Book I of the translation of the critical edition of the *Mahābhārata* (pp. 266-72)

(Note: “Baron” = *Kshatriya*)

2) Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism*, pp. 103-107, 124-127

Questions: What kinds of affinal (i.e. kinship) relations do we encounter in the *Mahābhārata*? How do people discuss their own and other’s statuses? Are relations considered legitimate always established by actual blood relation? What do such origin stories suggest about the text’s commentary on caste, relation, and identity? What does it mean to be “noble” in the *Mahābhārata*? Which characters have stark differences between their statuses and skill-sets? What does the text say about such figures?

Week 3: The Tragedy of Karṇa

Reading: 1) Hildebeitel, “Krishna in the *Mahabharata*: The Death of Karna” (53 pp.)

(Note: the lengthy translation here is the concluding part of the primary source readings of Reading #2 [below].

Skip the portion of the reading that is the translation of the *Mahābhārata* and come back to it after you have read everything else in Reading #2)

2) Selections of Karṇa’s story from the translation of the critical edition of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* (Note: This will be a number of files. Pay attention to the reading order. Read the translation of “The Death of Karna” from Hildebeitel last.)

3) Hegarty, “Situational Exploration of the Past: A Case Study in the Tragic History of Karṇa” (4 pp.)

Questions: Hildebeitel and *Mahābhārata*: What does the text want us to know about Karṇa, and when does it want us to know these facts? What do you think of Karṇa? What do you make of the Pāṇḍavas’ treatment of him (especially Bhīma’s)? Is Karṇa a tragic hero? What are his good and bad attributes? What’s his downfall? What

do you make of his death?

Hegarty: The narrative of the Mahabharata tends to tell the story episodically. At the end of one story, we return to the main narrative conversation between Janamejaya and Vaisampayana. A new question is asked and the narrative moves ahead. Sometimes, the narrative moves ahead via flashbacks that fill in a character's story. Why do we finally get Karṇa's full birth story (and the story of how Kuntī gets the boon that she uses to conceive the Pāṇḍavas) only in Book III, while we learn of the Pāṇḍavas' births in Book I? Why does the text use "dramatic irony" here? That is, why do you think it is important to the narrative that Karṇa *not* know his true origin at this point, but important that readers do?

## SECTION THREE: PROFESSOR STEVE HEINE

### "Religious Symbolism in the Songs of Bob Dylan"

The section of the course focuses on the notion that the music and poetry of Bob Dylan, Nobel Laureate for Literature, expresses in various ways very interesting and wide-ranging religious symbolism, with an emphasis on imagery associated with blood as representative of a state of being wounded and achieving personal wholeness through spiritual realization. Some examples include the songs "It's All Right Ma, I'm Only Bleeding" and "Pay

in Blood," plus the album *Blood on the Tracks*. Since his early work in the 1960s, Dylan has consistently used Biblical allusions and expressed a strong sense of his Jewish identity, but he has also incorporated mystical world-views appropriated from Zen Buddhism and evangelical Christianity in addition to American poetry, French literary symbolism, Existential philosophy, and Beat literature. We will look at several examples of his songs in which the religious quest is most apparent, while considering the issue of whether a contemporary performer influenced by Blues music can be considered a great writer and religious thinker.

Short PDF files will be made available with selections from the following books -

*Tangled Up in the Bible*, James Gilmour

*Simple Twist of Fate*, Andy Gil and Kevin Odegard

*Bargainin' for Salvation*, Steven Heine

*Bob Dylan and Philosophy*, Peter Vernezze

Also, students can access Dylan's lyrics at - [bobdylan.com/songs/](http://bobdylan.com/songs/)

#### SECTION FOUR: Iqbal Akhtar: texts of the Khoja

Divine blood as envisioned in Sufi texts is envisioned as light. That light connects the universe and creator to creation. The Islam section of this course will focus on the *Nūrinānmū* (‘The Chronicle of Light’) by Abd el Rahman written in Sindhi in the 13<sup>th</sup> century hegira/ 18<sup>th</sup> century CE and was part of the standard curriculum of madrassa education until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The version from which we will be working is a late 18<sup>th</sup> century Muslim Gujarati adaptation of this cosmological text in the [Sindhi Khōjā](#) script of the Khōjā community, which chronicles the creation of the world through the body of Muhammad and Divine light contained therein. It was subsequently translated into Punjabi, Urdu, Siraiki, and Hunza. The Khōjā are an amalgamated Indic merchant caste located between Sindh and Gujarat bound by endogamy, professional commerce, and caste religious practices (*khōjāpanth*) that began migrating to East

Africa in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The manuscript version of the text on which the study is based was written in India and sent to the Khōjā community in Zanzibar to be recited in the caste hall both on Friday and Monday during the day and evening in order to be protected from misfortune and enemies as well as to enhance one's faith. We will look at how communal Khōjā Muslim identity was formed and maintained throughout the Western Indian Ocean littoral using these narratives.

## SECTION FIVE: PROFESSOR ANA MARIA BIDEGAIN

### Blood in the Gospels

This section will focus on the Gospels' continuity and rupture with the Hebrew Bible. This part of the course will concentrate particularly on an analysis of Luke 22:20 "This Cup is the new covenant in my blood poured out for you".