

## **My Reflection On Entering The Course**

I have decided to take this course because I am currently on the study path to become some sort of psychologist. This course is something I believe is important to me because other cultures and religions will always be something relevant to learn about and that will affect how one might look at things or behave.

My thoughts on religion have been narrow, I am an atheist at the moment but I truly believe religion is an important part of our society as humans. This course will certainly help expand my mind and change my perspective on understanding and truly appreciating what has been built by many different cultures for many years, and I can't wait to dive deeper into the meaning of symbols and practices of eastern religions.

## **The Swastika as a Sacred Symbol**

Coming into this course I did not expect to be positively enlightened about the rich history of symbols that I see in my daily life or symbols I had no idea existed. The swastika was a symbol I had been taught to despise and to never allow it to have any other meaning besides its use from the Nazi's. This topic in the first week was an amazing way to introduce the variety of topics that we will cover in the course. For those not familiar with sacred symbols and their deep roots in history, this symbol of both auspiciousness and tragedy is a great introduction to realizing you truly need to put away bias and have an open perspective to be able to fully appreciate this course. The psychological impacts of this symbol in particular on those affected by world war 2

in modern times and the question of “can this symbol be forgiven?” is something that interests me from a psychology standpoint. When you take heavy negative variables and mix them with a symbol that was previously generally positive, it’s interesting how the negative history can override the positive history in certain cultures. In western culture, the swastika is mainly seen as a negative symbol in our history. While in eastern religions and India specifically, the positive history behind the symbol overpowers the negative symbol greatly. Although I understand that the symbol was reversed on the Nazi flag and combined with threatening colors, so it was engineered to have a negative impact in peoples memories, it is still interesting how when shown to holocaust survivors, there are many mixed thoughts and emotions on its use in eastern religions. It’s use in a variety of cultures and its rich history as a generally positive symbol before it was adapted by the Nazi’s, is also very intriguing. As a ‘simple’ symbol meaning it’s not too intricate or difficult to draw can lead towards the assumption there wasn’t any single creator of this symbol and it could have been used by many different cultures long ago. The Ukraine ivory bird that was found around 10,000 bce is an amazing archeological find, and it is also something that leads me to look into other symbols and historical valuables that mark the beginning of their use. As we completed the sacred symbols assignment, the list of recommended symbols was so great it led me into a deep research cycle of the history of symbols.

## **Sacred Cows**

Sacred Cows within Hinduism is an interesting topic. Miscommunication between the Vedic Sanskrit and classical Sanskrit has brought on very common misconceptions about cows, and has truly created a controversial topic especially now that the internet is a thing. One thing that was mentioned in the Beliefnet Q&A, is the mention of “there are often bitter disputes between Indians and in Pakistani’s”. It is interesting how widespread the misconception of “cows are

worshipped in Hinduism”, has slowly become this discussion topic that's turned into a way to discriminate another culture. It is definitely by no means the only example of how discrimination and hate is created between groups, but it is interesting. I am citing an article below, about a town that had a Jain pilgrimage site, which had begun a sort of argument between the Muslim population and the Jains. The Jains had wanted the town government to declare a restriction which relies on a strict vegetarian diet, and the Muslim population and Muslim leaders within the town tried their best to fight this. They eventually compromised, although I have to wonder what sort of arguments they must have had that were similar to the Hindus and Pakistani's. It's interesting that in an age of technology and search engines, arguments that revolve around misconceptions are still common.

[Why Is the Cow Sacred? --Hindu dharma Aghanya - Beliefnet](#)

[Holy Cows: Hinduism's Blessed Bovines \(learnreligions.com\)](#)

[The vegetarian town: They wouldn't hurt a fly but the Jains upset Palitana with meat-free plea | The Independent | The Independent](#)

### **Nine Lives Essay: After Thoughts**

After reading the book I was left with a lot of thoughts. The first thing that came to mind was how lucky Dalrymple is to have gotten to experience such a variety of cultures, and to be able to interact with these individuals. It seems as though immersing yourself and choosing to live in another culture is an excellent aid in writing about religions and their respective culture, and his dedication to writing something unbiased is something I look up to. Starting a Eastern Comparative religions course with no previous experience in learning about religions or any history on the eastern side of the world has been a challenge. Growing up I was taught to never impose my opinions on another culture, and to always keep respect and my own biases in mind

when having a conversation about religion. It's definitely been a bit of a struggle for me to open up my mind to allow myself to analyze and dive a bit deeper into the concepts and meaning of different religions. Having been assigned this book, which introduces religions in a way that isn't totally biased or rigid in structure to make it hard to read, was something that made me realize some things. First of all, learning is so objective and resources such as *Nine Lives*, although not a complete guide can be a way for someone such as myself, to begin to comprehend some of the intricate religions and practices I had not even realized existed. Secondly, having an author in which his writing portrays these religious individuals in a way that isn't biased, can set an example of how one might talk about or portray a religion in their writing without praising it or demeaning it in any way. Dalrymple sets an example of viewing religion from a perspective of education and respect. Letting an individual who is within and practicing the religion, describe their experience from a day to day point of view to sharing intimate personal history to their perspective of the religion as a whole, is spectacular in the way it allows for a greater point of view of how modernity is shifting the religious world in India and how these religions are adapting in a fast changing world.

## **Faith Connections**

Firstly I'd like to discuss Kumbh Mela. Starting off positive, the thing that interested me while first reading about this celebration is the fact the location changes depending on where the sun, moon and jupiter align in the sky coordinating with certain astrological (zodiac?) areas. It also seems as though there are different time periods in which it is held, such as every 3 years, 6 years and 12 years which all relate to the astrological aspect as well. As someone with no previous knowledge of such an event (even though 10's of millions of people attend!) It intrigues me that

even in today's modernity spreading through religions, astrological planetary movements and alignments still have importance and impact on certain traditions. Although it is probably ignorant for me to express that opinion it is something I had genuinely not considered before. I had an idea that planetary alignment and positions have impacted humans' decisions and religious practices, but to learn in depth about why they consider this the rightful time frame, is incredibly enlightening to how much space and our solar system has truly impacted any of the world's religions. The Faith Connections documentary was an interesting look into the celebration while also introducing a tiny sample of the individuals that attend. From Kishan the child who ran away from home, Sandeep and his family's journey, and Hatha Yogi Baba and baby Bajrangi along with a number of Sadhu's and others. The stories that are heavily focused on included children. I am curious if that was a story telling choice, to entice the audience to feel emotions towards the individuals, or if there is an important aspect of children in hinduism that I have not learned yet that was supposed to relate to the documentary. The lost and found tents amaze me, and I have done further research into the missing people and how it ties into modern times in which technology has been a great aid in reuniting those who were lost. From what my understanding is, with the rise of people using cellphones and missing databases being used to enter in the missing people, it has become much easier and safer for people to get reunited with their friends and family. This is a type of technology in which I believe can be used within religious celebrations without taking away the meaning of the event. The story I would like to analyze a bit more is of the individual Hatha Yogi Baba and his adopted child, baby Bajrangi. As he shared in the documentary, after three months of taking care of Bajrangi the police and social workers attempted to take him away from Yogi Baba, because he was a Sadhu and they thought he had kidnapped the child. This was an interesting concept to me since he had described how

that as he found the child, he had decided that this was what his destiny was and he was going to take this responsibility. It's interesting to see how someone who has decided to renounce the world, acknowledge the importance of raising an abandoned child and fully commit to it, it's like religious teachings and human nature have joined forces within this man's mind to give this child a guardian who wants to give this child a great life and feels the need to protect him. By natural instincts, I am referring to the idea that humans have some sort of natural care instinct, or an built in empathy mechanism, even if they had renounced the world and became a sadhu.

Sources:

Pandey, G. (2019, January 29). *Kumbh Mela: Lost and found at the world's biggest gathering*. BBC. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-46998178>

Mathur, A. (2019, February 16). *Why nobody gets lost at the Kumbh Mela anymore*. The Times of India. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/allahabad/why-nobody-gets-lost-at-the-kumbh-mela-anymore/articleshow/68008958.cms>

## **Bhagavad Gita Book Response**

I chose to answer 3 of the Questions to consider.

To identify a central message, I would probably start with the common themes: actions and their consequences, commitment to one's god, importance of Dharma or duty, betrayal, relationships or love, personal moral and ethics views, knowledge in understanding . These are the themes that jump out right away. I think the themes that are

most intertwined with a central message are the commitment to one's deity or god and the release of attachment from your actions and their consequences to fulfill one's dharma. As one's personal dharma is important in reaching spiritual freedom, it can be seen that allowing yourself to live and act under the guidance of Krishna and divine principles. Taking that concept and comparing it with Arjuna's predicament, it seems as though he is debating whether Krishna's guidance is truly the right thing as he would have to complete a duty in which he would have to abandon his own ethical and moral feelings. He kind of "stumbles onto a fork in the road" in which one side would allow him stray away from Krishna's and Dharma's law or rules and the other in which he places his own soul in the "hands" or spiritual guidance of Krishna and trusts it will lead his soul to what followers in Hinduism attempt to achieve. The central message could be interpreted differently, depending on what belief system and culture you live in. It's hard to identify a religion when some of the concepts within these verses could be argued to mean a variety of central messages. From my perspective, it seems as though the central message is to believe and trust in god (or Krishna in this case). That's the shortened version. The longer version would be when faced with a moral or ethical dilemma, trust in God (or Krishna) teachings because it will lead you to spiritual freedom.

If one is bad at interpreting poetry, in this case in terms of an ongoing dialogue, it could be quite difficult to interpret religious precepts. That was the case for me. In terms of understanding the story, and taking pieces of the dialogue to interpret into religious teachings or concepts it was hard for me to make connections. If one is skilled at interpreting dialogue and analogies however, it would probably be a lot more easier.

From page 66 verses 3 to 28 for example, before Krishna talks through those verses, Arjuna asks for the meaning of many things, and through verse 3-28, Krishna speaks of important religious concepts that relate to the self, action, yogic discipline, ect. For an entry point into important concepts of Hinduism and the importance of understanding these meanings, this section alone is a great example of how Bhagavad Gita is a great piece of literature to introduce oneself to Hinduism. I had read the translators introduction before reading the verses and the introduction had really helped me pick out and understand certain sections within the Bhagavad Gita. Especially since I have little background in analyzing religious literature, some things just go right over my head. When Krishna's dialogue hones in on persuading Arjuna, and Krishna describes the reasons why he must fight he introduces important concepts within Hinduism. So in the way that it is written, the teachings that Krishna speaks to Arjuna wonderfully allow a smooth entry point into Hinduism.

The self is the part of you that cannot die, it is essentially the spirit of a person called atman. The self is reincarnated into the human body, which is temporary. All of nature or matter is called "prakriti", and so I am assuming that the body can be considered a part of that word. I am still having a hard time understanding the relationship. From what I am currently understanding, to reach spiritual freedom, one has to detach the Self from the Body. In chapter 8, verse 4, Krishna says, "transient being is the physical; and the spirit is the divine" and in the same chapter in verse 13, "who sheds his body and goes forth, that one attains the highest goal.". It appears the body is vehicle to attain knowledge and experience, and to eventually gain the knowledge of how to free your Self from the physical matters that keep you trapped within the cycle of rebirth.



## **Buddhism in Japan and its Relationship with Shinto**

As my interest in Shinto began after the Sacred symbols project, after researching I wanted to look further into the inter faith relationship of Buddhism and Shinto. So to start from the beginning, Buddhism was introduced to Japan from travellers from Korea, and from the sources below, it seems like this introduction was around 6th CE. To begin I wanted to discuss the differences between the origins of the religion. Shinto is a religion that has unknown exact religions, and some theories revolve around Shintos origin's relating to ethnic religions, animist views, shamanistic, cults beliefs. Buddhism is considered a "Universalizing Religion" which from what I understand, means a religion that is meant to appeal to any person from any geographical location and the origins of Buddhism as the world commonly views it, begins with Buddha's life journey and the teachings he expressed. From the differences in those definitions of the origins, it's interesting to think about how exactly Buddhism influences Shinto. The first thing I'll mention is the way that both Shinto and Buddhism are both similar in that they could be considered ways of life. Although Buddhism now focuses on Buddha as a deity figure, what his teachings truly focused on was less of how he is a ruler of a religion and more on ethical and moral topics or lessons that one should live by. As Shinto is also considered a way of life and less of a religion, that similarity helps the understanding of the beginning of their interfaith relationship. Shinto is essentially a part of Japanese culture, and Buddhism can be considered a part of their culture too. In our Other Asian Religion assignment, a classmate brought the quote "Born Shinto, Die Buddhist" which is something I wanted to touch on. Shinto has birth celebrations/rituals, which speaks to the "Born Shinto" part of the quote. Although death is seen as impure to traditional Shinto followers, funerals are not a common thing, although it's worth noting sometimes after a death, the person's spirit becomes Kami in which a person is

“celebrated, worshipped or honored” through. As death is something that in modern times people want to acknowledge and hold funerals to honor the loss of a person, this is where Buddhism comes in. Buddhism does not consider death an impurity, it is rather seen as something natural and they believe in a rebirth cycle. As a person may want to mourn and acknowledge someone that has died, Buddhist traditions of funerals might appeal to them, hence the second part “Die Buddhist”. Shinto is a religion which heavily focuses on the life one is living in the present, while Buddhism is a religion in which acknowledges death, for someone to practice the two allows them to experience faith in both life and death, something that traditionally Shinto does not make room for. An interesting comparison that relates to death is the topic of rebirth or reincarnation. From what I’ve gathered in my research, Shinto does not believe in rebirth or reincarnation, although there may be beliefs in a land of the dead. Buddhism does believe in reincarnation. As Shinto focuses on appeasing and worshipping the Kami, to provide them with positive life experiences and good fortune, it can make sense that the gaps left were filled by Buddha’s moral and ethical teachings.

[The History of Buddhism in Japan | LIVE JAPAN travel guide](#)

[Buddhism in Ancient Japan - World History Encyclopedia](#)

[Buddhism and Shinto: The Two Pillars of Japanese Culture - Japanology](#)

[What does Buddhism teach about life after death? - Life after death - GCSE Religious Studies Revision - BBC Bitesize](#)

[BBC - Religion: Buddhism](#)

## **Buddhism in the News**

(The articles I read will be linked down below.)

The news articles that I chose for Buddhism in the News, mainly focus on the impact of Covid-19 on Buddhist monks as well as the religion in a general sense and also obesity in Thai Buddhist Monks. The first article I read was from 2018, talking about the rise in obesity in Thai Buddhist Monks. Which I believe is a topic that could have had a mini feature in Nine Lives. The impact of the modern fast and sugary foods that are given to the monks during their morning rounds of alm, are having a real impact on their bodies. The unhealthy food that is being given, is a product of modern times, highly processed food with high sugar content was most likely not as common and cheap as it is now. This article also speaks on monks and their relationship-or lack thereof-with exercise. An abbot spoke on the topic explaining that although they must not exercise for vanity reasons, they could do walking exercises. This is interesting. Buddhism is one religion we have talked about that has wonderfully navigated the impacts of modern issues. I cannot fully speak on Buddhist Monk alm rituals or the past or current food situation in Thailand, although I have some questions I wonder as I read this article. As Buddhism has been around for thousands of years, and in the past, monks have been able to stay relatively on the thin side, when did the problem with obesity begin? In more ancient times, were there standards for what you would offer a monk, and did people collectively agree to try and feed monks particularly healthy things, or is it that they are offering similar foods as older times but the food is prepared much differently now, and it is resulting in unhealthy monks? Another thing to consider is the rise in poverty, is there a bigger wealth disparity, resulting in some unhealthy but sweet options given from people who can not afford expensive or more organic/healthy options? In the article they mention some initiatives which include teaching chefs at temples how to prepare healthy foods, encouraging the

general public to start offering less sugary foods, ect. I cannot seem to find any recent articles or data which have an update, but I will keep looking to see if the healthier monk initiative is working.

Covid 19 is impacting so many cultures around the world, and the way religion's are responding to it is quite interesting. First I'd like to talk about the article that speaks on Thai buddhist monk's alm morning routine during Covid times. It seems as though they are still happening, with social distancing and masks, which is amazing. The idea that they alm's are still allowed, shows how much religious rituals and religion is honored to this day, and how instead of forcing the monks to find food another way, they allow this ancient tradition to keep happening.

I would like to make a comparison and an imaginary situation. Imagine there was a religion that had traditions and many people within Canada followed these traditions and we had a type of Monk here that needed to complete alm's for food. Would the government and health organizations allow for these to alms to happen? Would a religious tradition be honored and understood? I mean there is definitely no definitive answer to those questions, although it's interesting to compare our modern western world, to the world Thai Buddhist Monks live in. Although it's the same world, the societal "rules and standards" and awareness of the importance of religions are different, and I wonder if religions such as Buddhism will forever live on as modernity slowly creeps into many religious geographical locations. Although religion is one of the foundations of the world that we know, will it give in to certain changes that a modern world might demand? An example of how Buddhism is figuring out ways to react and to almost defend itself from Covid, is highlighted in the last listed article below. Within Buddhist communities, there is an increase in Buddhist leaders creating or performing protection rites, to combat the spread and effects of the virus. They are handing out blessed or sacred objects which are meant

to protect against the virus, and as the virus is sometimes seen as something brought on by evil or “demonic forces”. Included in the article was a story of a priest who had tweeted a picture of “ the great Vairocana Buddha” and had said within the tweet that “the image would protect all who lays eyes upon it”. This use of modern technology to display religious concepts is incredibly interesting in the way that it is showing how Buddhism, alongside many religions, are incorporating and using technology to increase and maximize their ability to teach or reach out to a large amount of people, especially in the past year as social gatherings and social situations are not permitted.

[Why Buddhist monks collect alms and visit households even in times of social distancing \(theconversation.com\)](#)

[Battle of the bulge: Thailand strives to bring monk obesity crisis under control | Thailand | The Guardian](#)  
[How do Buddhists handle coronavirus? The answer is not just meditation \(theconversation.com\)](#)

### **My Other Asian Religion Topic: Shinto**

As I chose Shinto, as my focus for my Other Asian Religion Topic, I got the privilege to dive deep into the many topics and concepts that are within Shinto and focus a good amount of time to study this topic. First I’d like to talk about the things that had personally stood out to me. With the large amount of the population who participate Shinto rituals, and the incredibly large amount of Shinto shrines, it is entirely understandable how Shinto and Japan’s culture are so closely related. Shinto is particularly interesting to me because of it’s cloudy origins. The various theories that revolve around other ethnic religions, slowly learning, adapting and creating rituals which revolve around Kami, and then becoming influences and in a way, absorbing ways of

living or thinking from other major religions such as Buddhism, very much is similar but unique from other major ethnic religions. Although the abrahamic religions all kind of branched out and were developed around the same time period, they all had similar concepts of monotheism. Shinto however, as it's origins are unknown is interesting. There are origin stories of the Kami, but even the most ancient literature related to Shinto is years after the actual beginning of how the common concepts of specific Kami were created. I think one part of the puzzle that would help me understand Shinto is the formation of the islands of Japan itself. I have to assume the Ainu (whom I believe were travellers from from Siberia) were the first to settle, although as there is controversial and confusing information I also am wanting to believe travellers from other parts of Asia had also settled on Japan. The thing that I am curious about that related to the first settlers, is the first people on Japan, and the respective ethnic religions that they were apart of are definitely contributing factors to the unionizing of Shinto as a religion. I understand that the Yamato clan and as the rise of state shinto and emperors had a large effect on the collection of religious beliefs that is now Shinto, there has to be more to the puzzle to how these separate beliefs developed into a belief system. The large variety of Kami is also something that is interesting. Although there are many religions which are polytheistic, I wish I would have chosen a religion that had more than one god for my comparative religions grid, to compare the deities to see how many belong into the same categories of Kami. Of course there would be differences in deities that relate to natural phenomena and food production due to geographical locations, but im interested in the deities that reflect cultural and moral ethics and beliefs. The differences would be very revealing of the society and cultural beliefs of ancient times.

## Jainism in the News

I linked the three articles I have read down below. In this discussion I will mainly be talking about the act of educating young people of how and why one would become a Jain monk or nun, and the banning of long fasting practices and especially santhara (the ritualistic fasting to death). First, the topic of young people becoming Jain ascetics, was introduced to me in *Nine Lives*. At the moment I can't remember her name, but the Jain nun that was featured within *Nine Lives* and the chapter that was written about her, had introduced me into a lot of the concepts that are involved in Jainism. The article *India Jains: Why these youngsters renouncing the world*, explains some reasons why an increase of young people are renouncing the world. The highlighted reasons include:

“growing disenchantment among the young with the pressures of a modern world, gurus of the faith adopting modern technology to make it easier for people to communicate religious ideas and finally, a superstructure of religious retreats that allows young people to experiment with monastic life long before they choose to commit to it.”

In relation to a theme within *Nine Lives* and the overall theme of how religion is being influenced by modernity and technology, this journal entry will mainly focus on this theme of Modernity and Religion. Although for the entirety of the history of Jainism, the renunciation of the world has been continuous, although interestingly the article which was written in 2019 highlights the fact that in recent years, the numbers of Deeksha have risen to hundreds compared to less than 20 ‘years ago’. First let's talk about “growing disenchantment among the young with the pressures of a modern world”. It's no secret that the societal and religious expectations have transformed and have changed over time. I am not sure of the statistics that go along with the

amount of younger people that renunciate the world, but apparently to a professor at a university, the numbers have been rising in recent years. As technology and modern times create new stressors for young people in any culture, it personally does not surprise me that there is a rise in renunciation. There certainly are pressures, but as the Jain nun or monk lifestyle is considered “extreme”, it brings me to think about the impact and inspiration of gurus. The article contains a section that focuses on “social-media gurus”. This section highlights the idea that renunciation stories and explanations are more accessible to young people with the rise of social media, and how Jain literature is also offered in other languages. A question that immediately comes to mind is, ‘Has increases in renunciation happened before in Jain history, and was it due to accessibility to teachings and gurus, or is the rise of social media and increased accessibility unique to this situation?’ and then also a question of, ‘Is life becoming uniquely more difficult because of societal and modern pressures, or have these pressures always been a factor within young people renouncing the world?’ A constant variable within life is change, and to religions this variable is definitely well known. It does not surprise me that young people are taking on the role of Jain monks and nuns, but the idea that the reasons to take that specific path in life has not changed over time, is extremely telling of how religions have survived and thrived within modern times. To talk about the article which speaks on the 13 year old girl who died while fasting, I am a bit confused and unsure of my feelings. News/Media outlets usually have a bias or agenda and although I will not base my entire view or opinion on this one article, I think it is important for me to acknowledge the complexity of this specific article topic. From my initial perspective, the perspective of someone from north america who is not religious, would be to feel sympathy and to really only view this from the perspective that the authorities share, that the parents have played a part in her death. I most certainly could not really have any solid feelings on this as I



was not that girl, I will never really know what happened. But understanding that within Jainism, fasting is an important and a very common practice, I cannot be surprised that something like this would occur. So I will talk mainly on the religious view on this and not the legality of it all. What really gets my brain thinking, is the comparison of santhara and what is known as “assisted suicide” in english speaking countries. From my understanding, Santhara is banned within india. Assisted suicide is also not allowed in some countries but Canada for example has specific allowances for it to be done. In a way, Santhara is assisted suicide in the way that you are monitored the whole time, and traditionally there is a routine you follow while taking that path that avoids the participant from suffering greatly. What my brain is having troubles with, is the example of the Jain Nun’s friend in Nine Lives who was allowed to take that path. Was that before or after the ban? Additionally, do they allow “medically assisted” suicides in India, and if so, for the benefit of Jain ascetics, why would they not allow santhara if it has been a religious practice for ages? My understanding of Jain ascetic “paths of life” has definitely reached a level of questioning of legality of certain practices and comparison of other practices and situations which are similar. This journal entry was difficult for me, but it is probably the topic that I will continue to learn about as it is extremely interesting, thought provoking and from someone who is interested in the psychology behind these “extreme” practices, Jain ascetic life is beautifully mysterious.

[13-Year-Old Jain Girl Dies After 68 Days of Fasting - World Religion News](#)

[India Jains: Why are these youngsters renouncing the world? - BBC News](#)

## **Reflections on Leaving the Course...**

This course certainly was challenging for me. In terms of learning how to analyze and compare religions, as well as attempting to comprehend concepts of symbols, sacred literature and the general beliefs of any religion. Perhaps if I was born into a religion, or lived within a heavily religious community, these sorts of ideas or processes of understanding could have come more naturally, but maybe it also wouldn't have changed a thing. The course assignments in general were very well organized and had left a lot of options which I think was helpful for a beginner. To allow a student to write within a journal to further let them soak up the literature or other types of media in which we used to understand religions is probably the most effective way to let a student feel like they are in control of their personal learning and it certainly made me feel like I was able to comprehend it better when I had to write it out. One thing that I mentioned a lot through these journals was 'bias'. It's interesting how my perspective on my religion has changed, especially through learning about the eastern religions specifically. Christianity was the only religion I heard people talking about when I was younger, and this bias against christianity had given me this unconscious distrust of religions in general. It's hard to take a class and realize that I was totally ignorant in the way I had not bothered looking into religions and how important they are to the world we live in now. I think I read somewhere that something like 80% of the world is a part of a religion. It just makes one wonder, if most of the world has a belief in something, whether it be a single god, or universal law or many deities, what are the chances that I grew up in a small community that had felt betrayed by the worlds biggest religion?

I am having a hard time deciding if I could take another religion course in the future. This course has helped me sort of begin to comprehend how to analyze a complicated topic, I realized things like the comparative religions grid is a marvelous idea to help break down the mechanics, concepts and idea of a topic. This course has also helped me begin to think a bit outside the box

in a way, in the context of putting aside what I know to look or believe to try and understand subjects unfamiliar to me. I think I may not have followed the specific guidelines in writing this journal, my writing may be a bit disorganized, but I attempted maintain a sense of topic and order in which I spoke within each entry.