

Encounters with a Hindu Classic: *The Bhagavad Gita* or “Song of the Lord”

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[ZOOM LINK](#)

Meeting Dates: October 26 - November 30 (No class November 23)

Meeting Time: Wednesday, 2:10-3:35 pm ET

Course Description: The influential Hindu classic, the *Bhagavad Gita*, or “Song of the Lord,” has been studied and celebrated for generations as a timeless text of deep spiritual wisdom that traces its origins to ancient India. In relatively few pages the *Gita* succinctly presents several fundamental elements of Indian philosophy and Hindu philosophy, introduces seminal characterizations of the Hindu god, Krishna, and recounts a story that has come to be enshrined as a cornerstone of Hindu tradition. At the same time, the book has also influenced and inspired countless non-Hindus and non-Indians, such as Henry David Thoreau, Robert Oppenheimer, T.S. Eliot, and Philip Glass.

This course facilitates a direct encounter with the *Bhagavad Gita* while also introducing how and why it has come to be celebrated as one of the foremost representatives of the Hindu tradition. Throughout our five sessions together we will closely read the entire text of the *Bhagavad Gita* while we closely consider its broader historical, literary, and religious significance. Class meetings will consist of short lectures designed to provide a basic entry-point for grasping the meaning of the Sanskrit text in translation and the broader socio-cultural world it engages. There will be ample opportunity for discussion and sharing of responses and reactions to our reading as we collectively grapple with a cherished and diversely interpreted work of literature that is deeply bound to broader philosophical and theological traditions.

Books:

The Bhagavad Gita: Krishna’s Counsel in Time of War translated by Barbara Stoler Miller

The Bhagavad Gita: A Biography by Richard Davis

Preparation for First Class Meeting:

As a pre-course introductory exercise, students are encouraged to track down a copy, any copy, of the *Bhagavad Gita* and do their best to read through the entire text on their own. Although we will rely on Stoler Miller’s translation for our in-class discussions, discovering where the *Gita* resides in your own world will grant us collective insight into where and how the text is situated within our own North American cultural landscape. You might consider consulting friends, children, partners, long-neglected corners of your bookshelves in search of a copy. We will discuss first impressions of the text and share our stories of discovery during our first meeting.

Schedule:

October 26th

Reading Assignment: *Bhagavad Gita* (read/skim all); Davis Chapters 1 and 5

Focus Topic(s): Meet and Greet. What is the *Gita*? Overview of Gita. Indian Epic tradition. Issues of Translation.

November 2nd

Reading Assignment: *Bhagavad Gita* Chapters 1-6; Davis (selections on dharma)

Focus Topic(s): Frame story. Key characters. What is Dharma? What is the role of *dharma* in the Gita? Relevance of *dharma* for Hindu tradition.

November 9th

Reading Assignment: *Bhagavad Gita* Chapters 7-12; Davis Chapters 2 & 4

Focus Topic(s): Who is Krishna? What is *bhakti*? What does devotion to Krishna entail? Historical perspectives on Krishna.

November 16th

Reading Assignment: *Bhagavad Gita* (selections on *jnana* and *karma*);

Focus Topic(s): Trimārga (three yogas). Philosophical and theological teachings. Knowledge (*jnana*). Action (*karma*).

November 23rd: No Class Meeting

November 30th

Reading Assignment: *Bhagavad Gita* Chapters 17-18; Davis Chapter 6

Focus Topic(s): Narrative Resolutions. Revisiting core themes. Performance and reception histories. Further studies. Course conclusions.