Sacred Texts and Oral Traditions

Instructor: Rabbi Dr. Laura Duhan-Kaplan
Email: LDKaplan@vst.edu
Office hours during term: By appointment

Purpose: An introduction to sacred scripture and oral narrative in four traditions: Tanakh in Judaism, New Testament in Christianity, Qur’an in Islam, and Oral Stories in Indigenous Traditions. For each tradition, we will become acquainted with content, history, transmission, interpretation, and cultural significance. We will highlight oral teachings within each tradition, and overlapping story threads between the traditions.

Competence Objectives: Students will be expected to learn and demonstrate the ability to:
• Summarize content and style of Tanakh, New Testament, Quran, and Indigenous Oral Narratives
• Explain and apply a variety of culturally appropriate interpretive techniques for each
• Explain the role that sacred narrative and text plays in each tradition
• Summarize how each scriptural or narrative tradition was initiated, developed and preserved
• Articulate a personal understanding of the sources of sacredness in sacred narrative

Format: Spring term 2021, Thursdays 2:00 pm - 5:00 pm, January 21, 28; February 4, 11, 18, 25; March 11, 18, 25; April 1, 8. Course activities include reading, writing, lecture, discussion, guest speakers, videos.

Guest speakers: Rev. Dr. Ray Aldred, Rabbi Rachel Barenblat, Professor Seemi Ghazi, Rev. Dr. Jason Byassee

Identification of the levels at which the course can be taken: Certificate, Basic (Diploma / MA / M.Div) or Advanced (Th.M).

Required reading:

Please buy or borrow:
Bible, any edition. Excerpts TBA.

Posted on Canvas: Chapters and short essays:
Byassee, Jason. “Learning Scripture in Nazareth: God is Jewish, Catholic, and Pentecostal” in Surprised by Jesus Again: Reading the Bible in Communion with the Saints (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 2019.
Coward, Harold. “Scripture in Christianity” in 
Scripture in the World Religions: A Short 

Duhan-Kaplan, Laura, “Contemplating Scripture: The Shema” in 
The Infinity Inside (Albion-Andalus), 2019.

Ehrman, Bart. “Jesus, the Jewish Messiah: The Gospel According to Matthew” in 


Kimmerer, Robin Wall, “Skywoman Falling,” in 
Braiding Sweetgrass (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions), 2013.


Prothero, Stephen, “Islam,” in 

Rahman, Jamal, “This Is the Book; Meditate on Its Signs,” in 

Rosenberg, Joel. “Bible: Narrative” in Barry Holtz, ed., 

**Posted on Canvas: Link to Full E-Book**
Aldred, Ray and Duhan-Kaplan, Laura, eds. Spirit of Reconciliation (Toronto: Canadian Race Relations Foundation), 2020.

**Posted on Canvas: Links to Videos**
“Koran By Heart,” (80 minute feature film)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ptHdmw57rzM

Indigenous Tourism, “Sharing the Stories of our Ancestors,” (2 minute video),
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z4UIy49qQ6U

https://moa.ubc.ca/2020/06/moafromhome-stay-connected-online/

Tessellate Institute, “Mosque One” (13 minute video)

Thunderbird, Shannon, “Wisdom of Ages,” (7 minute storytelling video),
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r9x37uQe9mk

**Assignments:**

*For all students:*
- Attendance in accordance with VST policies
- Thoughtful, engaged participation in class discussion and activities

*Additional for all Asynchronous students and for all students who miss a class:*
• Arrangement with the instructor for weekly email exchange or bi-monthly conversation to document and deepen learning

Additional for all Certificate and Degree students:
• Completion of assigned readings
• Three short (750) papers in response to an open-ended question, demonstrating personal engagement, awareness of at least one interpretive approach, and mastery of relevant content (due Feb 11, Mar 6, March 25)

Additional for Basic-level students (MATS, M.Div, MAPPL, MAIIS):
• A 3000-word final paper on a topic of the student’s choice, demonstrating course competencies, and involving research (5 sources) beyond the assigned course readings (due April 16 for graduating students; April 23 for all others. For submissions after these dates, you will need a medical extension through the Dean’s office.)

Additional for Advanced-level students (Th.M.):
• A 4000-word final paper on a topic of the student’s choice, demonstrating course competencies, and involving significant research (10 sources) beyond the course readings (due May 25)

Asynchronous students (for each class) and synchronous students who miss a class:
• Within a week: Watch the recording and send the instructor an email of 250 words that (a) lists three key points from the class, and (b) engages with one of them by either commenting or asking and answering a question about it.

Please submit written assignments in MS Word format, via email to LDKaplan@vst.edu. Please follow writing guidelines posted on Canvas.

Prerequisites: None.