Death is a central concern for all religious systems. Peter Berger (1967), a sociologist who has written on religion, says: “Witnessing the death of others (notably, of course, of significant others) and anticipating his own death, the individual is strongly propelled to question the ad hoc cognitive and normative operating procedure of his ‘normal’ life in society. Death presents society with a formidable problem not only because of its obvious threat to the continuity of human relationships, but because it threatens the basic assumptions of order on which society rests.” Fear of Death, more specifically the fear of the senselessness that death implies, Berger suggests, requires strategies to make sense of this experience.

This course will examine the variety of ways that Indian religions approach death, dying, and death related issues. We will primarily look at historical attitudes toward death as expressed in religious literature. Additionally, we will examine archaeological material to glean more information about how Indians memorialize, remember, and dispose of the dead. We will take an interdisciplinary approach, examining the issues around death from many angles: religious, social, cultural, philosophical, ethical, and medical.

Throughout this course we will use Berger’s notion that religion gives meaning to our experiences, Death in particular, to frame our discussions. How does religion make sense of Death? How does a particular religious ritual, narrative, doctrine, or experience restore the order that Berger suggests is undermined by the conception of death, one’s own and of our significant others? Does using Berger’s question to approach religious responses to Death efface other important issues?

The student should set the following goals for their enrollment in this class: 1) to acquire a basic knowledge of the history and culture of Indian religions; 2) to understand how those religions understand death and dying; 3) to develop the ability to think both empathetically and critically about religious claims; 4) to develop the ability to convey that understanding in writing.

TEXTS

All Class Readings and Bonus Readings are available on the Blackboard page for this class.
CLASS ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION are crucial to your success in this class. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class. You will be allowed three absences throughout the semester. Any absences in excess of this will directly affect your grade. You will be expected not only to have read all assigned readings by the class period, but also to have reflected upon them. Participation can be as easy as asking for clarification on a concept, or as challenging as trying to engage the instructor directly on the relevance of the material to your everyday life. Participation is the best way to ensure you understand the material, and that is the best way to ensure you do well in the class.

There will be one SHORT QUIZ, which will assess your knowledge of a smaller section of the course. The quiz will be composed of multiple choice and short answer questions. This will be the best indicator for how well you are absorbing the material, and how well you will do on the exams and essays. The Short Quiz will be on February 9th.

ESSAY ONE will give you the opportunity to develop the ability to express the ideas you have learned in class in writing. This assignment is to be two pages in length. (Two normal size sheets with default Word margins with 12 pt font.) You will be able to select topics from a list provided by the instructor early in the semester. Essay One will be due on February 27th.

The MID-TERM EXAMINATION will assess your knowledge of the material covered in the first half of the class. The Exam will be mainly short answer with one or two short essays. The Mid-Term Exam will be on March 16th.

In ESSAY TWO you will need to demonstrate your ability to present an argument. Essay topics will be discussed midway through the semester. This assignment is five pages in length. (Five normal size sheets with default Word margins with 12 pt font.) Essay Two will be due at the beginning of class on April 21st.

The FINAL EXAMINATION will assess your knowledge of all the material covered in class. The Exam will be mainly short answer with one or two short essays.

The BONUS READINGS present an opportunity for you to gain exposure to more material than I was able to fit into the Class Readings. Additionally, each Bonus Reading gives you the possibility of extra credit. In exchange for a one page summary of the contents and primary argument of the author—which must demonstrate that you read and understood, to some degree, the essay—one percentage point will be added to your final grade. Thus if you do all ten essays, your grade will be raised by a full letter grade. Your one page summary will be due by the beginning of class on Monday of the following week.

Various aspects of performance will be weighted as listed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attendance and Class Participation</th>
<th>10%</th>
<th>Mid-Term Examination</th>
<th>20%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short Quiz</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Essay Two</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay One</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>Final Examination</td>
<td>20%</td>
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</tbody>
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Policies

Academic Dishonesty:
“Lebanon Valley College expects its students to uphold the principles of academic honesty. Violations of these principles will not be tolerated. A student shall neither hinder nor unfairly assist the efforts of other students to complete their work. All individual work that a student produces and submits as a course assignment must be the student’s own. Cheating and plagiarism are acts of academic dishonesty. Cheating is an act that deceives or defrauds. It includes, but is not limited to, looking at another's exam or quiz, using unauthorized materials during an exam or quiz, colluding on assignments without the permission or knowledge of the instructor, and furnishing false information for the purpose of receiving special consideration, such as postponement of an exam, essay, quiz or deadline of an oral presentation. Plagiarism is the act of submitting as one’s own the work (the words, ideas, images, or compositions) of another person or persons without accurate attribution. Plagiarism can manifest itself in various ways: it can arise from sloppy note-taking; it can emerge as the incomplete or incompetent citation of resources; it can take the form of the wholesale submission of other people’s work as one’s own, whether from an online, oral or printed source. The seriousness of an instance of plagiarism—its moral character as an act of academic dishonesty—normally depends on the extent to which a student intends to deceive and mislead the reader as to the authorship of the work in question. Initially, the instructor will make this determination.” (From LVC’s Undergraduate Academic Regulations and Procedures: http://www.lvc.edu/catalog/acad-reg-procedures.aspx?bhiw=1024)

Details on plagiarism and how to avoid it can also be found at this site: http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/scholdis_plagiarism.php
You will be held responsible for understanding what is and what is not plagiarism. I will not give anyone a second chance on this issue.

Students with Disabilities:
If you have a physical, medical, psychological, or learning disability that is going to impact your attendance or require accommodation, please let me know. In order to ensure that your learning needs are appropriately met, you will need to provide documentation of your disability or medical condition to the Director of Disability Services in Humanities 206-D, 867–6071. The Office of Disability Services will then provide a letter of verification of disability that describes the accommodations needed for this class.

Absence for Religious Holidays:
If you must miss class for the observance of a religious holy day, inform the instructor as far in advance of the absence as possible, so that arrangements can be made to complete an assignment within a reasonable time after the absence. Notice given at least fourteen days prior to the classes scheduled on dates the student will be absent will constitute an excused absence. For religious holy days that fall within the first two weeks of the semester, notice should be given on the first day of the semester.

Syllabus:
The syllabus is a tentative schedule and is subject to change as the need arises students will be made aware of any changes with enough time to adequately prepare for class.
COURSE SCHEDULE

Week One:
(Jan. 21): Introduction  
(Jan. 23): Introduction to Death: Hinduism  

Week Two:
(Jan. 26): Introduction to Death: Hinduism (continued)  
(Jan. 28): Introduction to Death: Hinduism (continued)  
(Jan. 30): Introduction to Death: Hinduism (continued)  


Week Three:
(Feb. 2): Introduction to Death: Buddhism  
(Feb. 4): Introduction to Death: Islam  
(Feb. 6): No Class (Sayers Presenting in Austin)


Week Four:  (Short Quiz on February 9th)  
(Feb. 9): Confronting Death: Aging

(Feb. 1): Confronting Death: Aging (continued)

(Feb. 13): Confronting Death: Myth


Week Five:
(Feb. 16): Confronting Death: Poetry

(Feb. 18): Confronting Death: The Example of the Buddha

(Feb. 20): Confronting Death: The Example of the Buddha (continued)


Week Six:  
(Essay One due February 27th)
(Feb. 23): Confronting Death: Renunciation


(Feb. 25): Confronting Death: Renunciation (continued)

(Feb. 27): Confronting Death: Sati: Widow Sacrifice

Week Seven:
(Mar. 2): Spring Vacation: No Class
(Mar. 3): Spring Vacation: No Class
(Mar. 5): Spring Vacation: No Class

Week Eight:
(Mar. 9): Confronting Death: Martyrdom

(Mar. 11): Death Ritual: Sapindikarana

(Mar. 13): Death Ritual: The Household Texts

Bonus Reading: Nicholas, Ralph W. “Shraddha, Impurity, and Relations between the Living and the Dead.” In Contributions to Indian Sociology New Series 15.1–2 (Jan-Dec 1981), 367–379.

Week Nine:
(Mar. 16): Mid-Term
(Mar. 18): Death Ritual: Mythic Representations

(Mar. 20): Death Ritual: A Buddhist Take


Week Ten:
(Mar. 23): The Intermediate State
(Mar. 25): The Intermediate State (continued)

(Mar. 27): The Afterlife: Two Paths


Week Eleven:

(Mar. 30): The Afterlife: The Rig Veda


(Apr. 1): The Afterlife: The Rig Veda (continued)

(Apr. 3): The Afterlife: The Road to Hell


Week Twelve:

(Apr. 6): The Afterlife: Heaven


(Apr. 8): The Afterlife: Return from Hell


(Apr. 10): Easter Break: No Class


Week Thirteen:

(Apr. 13): Easter Break: No Class

(Apr. 15): Unnatural Death: Appeasing the Dead

(Apr. 17): Unnatural Death: Possession

Week Fourteen:  **(Essay Two Due April 21st)**
(Apr. 20): Film: Forest of Bliss
(Apr. 22): Film: Forest of Bliss (continued)
(Apr. 24): Film: Forest of Bliss: Discussion

Week Fifteen:
(Apr. 27): Commemoration of the Dead: Hero Stones

(Apr. 29): Commemoration of the Dead: Hero Stones (continued)
(May. 1): Commemoration of the Dead: Cults of the Dead


Week Sixteen:
(May. 4): Commemoration of the Dead: Cults of the Dead (continued)
(May. 6): Final Review