



HRBS 4840
Sacred Texts Across Traditions
Prof. Dr. Ibrahim Farajajé and Prof.
Zachary Markwith
11-15 August, 2014
9:00am-5:00pm
OFFICE HOURS DURING INTENSIVE:
5:00-6:00PM

Starr King School for the Ministry
2441 Le Conte Ave
Berkeley CA 94709
Fireside Room

ALL THAT YOU TOUCH

YOU CHANGE .

ALL THAT YOU CHANGE

CHANGES YOU .

THE ONLY LASTING TRUTH

IS CHANGE .

GOD

IS CHANGE .

OCTAVIA E. BUTLER

Sacred Texts Across Traditions proposes to examine certain themes in sacred texts and orature from the perspective of multireligious intertextuality. In order to do this, we must first clarify for ourselves the notions of “text” and notions of “sacrality”. What is a “text”? And what does “sacred” mean? Who decides that a “text” is a “text”? Who decides that it is “sacred”? What

is the aesthetic of a Vodun sacred text? Do “texts” create sacred geographies? Is a Tibetan mandala or a Navajo sand-painting a “text”? Can a “text” be impermanent? What about installation-texts? Performance-texts? And what happens when a text moves from one context to another, from one medium to another, from being recited to being written or vice-versa? How are different forms of embodiment embraced in different forms of text? How does one define the ASL version of a sacred text? At the risk of sounding like the ad for a PBS series, what is it that drives us to create/perform/commit/write/wear/be sacred texts?

This perspective allows us to present diverse sacred texts in conversation with each other, and also provides a context for reading them in a manner that allows recognition of interconnections between texts that might not be immediately identifiable. We will expand this by using the interrelation between hypertextuality, interdiscursivity and oral tradition to deepen the notion of "text".

The readings will centre around the themes of:

- . Creation**
- . "Genders" and "Sexualities"**

- **Peace/Justice**
- **Spiritual body and celestial Earth**
- **Environment and Embodiment**

We will examine:

- **"Orature" from Indigenous Peoples' Oral Traditions**
 - **Hebrew Bible**
- **Christian Scriptures**
 - **Gnostic Texts**
 - **Qur'an**
 - **Bhagavad Gita**
 - **Tao te Ching**

Members of the class will be divided into chevruta groups. In addition to the lectures, students will have the opportunity to work directly with these texts, as well as others, in their chevruta groups.

FINAL PROJECT:

1. The final project of this class will be the creation of a Sacred Texts Anthology. Each student will present a piece of their own creation for inclusion in this Anthology. It can be a "text" of their definition and medium. We will discuss this in greater length during the first class session.

Course Goals:

Textual and hermeneutical learning

- Enter into conversation with selections from our sacred texts through multireligious intertextuality, hypertextuality, interdiscursivity, the confluence of oral traditions and texts, and other critical approaches.**
- How do these and other approaches to sacred texts problematize “normative,” “orthodox” or dominant readings by introducing the inherent or creative polyvalence and transvalence of languages, texts, and interpretations?**
- What are the intellectual and practical consequences of recognizing multiple voices, influences, and readings in a given text in relation to creation narratives, gender, sexuality, peace and justice, spiritual body and celestial earth, the environment and embodiment?**

Discussion

- Engage in partner chevruta discussions and group class discussions surrounding the diverse meanings of our sacred texts in relation to course themes and our own contexts and identities.**
- How do sacred texts remain living texts through oral transmission and recitation, spiritual exegesis, and embodiment through ritual, art,**

imagination, social justice and other means?

—Conversely, what are the processes and modes of codification and indoctrination that reify texts and consign them to contexts and interpretations that exclude others?

Reflection and Writing

—Using our texts and hermeneutical approaches, as well as insights from discussions, articulate what our sacred texts mean to you with awareness of their diverse historical and cultural origins and interpretations.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

By the end of the course, the student will be able to:

- 1. Demonstrate awareness and understanding of what varying notions and forms of “Sacred Text” as well as how such texts are connected intersectionally with issues of race, class, gender, sexualities, disability, etc..**
- 2. Engage (through discussion and written work) important themes in the theory and praxis of creation and analysis of sacred texts**

- 3. Engage with sacred texts in various forms.**
- 4. Participate in the creation of a Sacred Text Anthology, in which the student makes a contribution in their context to the development of bodies of sacred texts.**

COURSE REQUIREMENTS: Successful completion of the course will be based upon several criteria:

- 1. Attendance and active participation in class discussions (25%)**
- 2. Chevruta practice assignments (25%)**
- 3. Daily Sacred Texts practice AND**
- 4. Final project: Contribution to the Sacred Texts Anthology: particular focus to be selected by student in conversation with the professors) (50%)**

Students with disabilities, health concerns, etc. who so desire may make special arrangements with the professors at or immediately following the first session. This is a justice and sustainability issue and will

**allow the student to be in the course in a way
which is sustainable for them.**

GRADING

**The grading process is based on a
covenant between the professors and the
learners, in order to avoid any sort of
“bargaining”, etc. around grades, once they
are assigned.**

**ATTENTION: FOR THE FIRST DAY OF
THIS INTENSIVE, PLEASE BRING WHAT
YOU CONSIDER TO BE ONE OF YOUR
FAVOURITE “SACRED TEXTS”: it can be
a written text, an oral text, a film clip,
music, etc...**

Course schedule:

Monday, August 11

**Introduction, hermeneutical texts and approaches
chevruta group reading and discussion**

**Homework: Indigenous Orature and Hebrew Bible
readings**

Tuesday, August 12

Indigenous Orature—Navajo emergence narrative

**chevruta group reading and discussion
Hebrew Bible—Sarah and Hajar cycle;**

**Homework: The Message of the Qur'an reading—
Chapter of the Cave selection (18:60-82)**

Wednesday, August 13

**Quran—Chapter of the Cave (18:60-82), Khidr and
Ilyas (Elijah/Elias)**

chevruta group reading and discussion

**Homework: The Gospel of John and The Gospel
of Thomas readings**

Thursday, August 14

**The Gospel of John Passion narrative
chevruta group reading and discussion
The Gospel of Thomas**

**Homework: Bhagavad Gita and Tao te Ching
readings**

Friday, August 15

**Bhagavad Gita
chevruta group reading and discussion
Tao te Ching**

CLOSING:

Note: Readings for each day should be done the night before with the exception of the first day's selections, which will be read during Monday's chevruta group meeting.

Daily class sessions will include lecture, ritual work, readings, collaborative reflection and work in small chevruta groups.

Primary texts:

Orature—Navajo/First Nations emergence narratives

**The Jewish Study Bible: Featuring the Jewish Publication Society TANAKH Translation
(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)**

**The Jewish Annotated New Testament, Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Z. Brettler, editors
(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011)**

**—Asad, Muhammad, The Message of the Qur'an
(Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980).
(www.altafsir.com)**

**—Prabhupada, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami,
Bhagavad-Gita As It Is (Los Angeles:
Bhaktivedanta Book Trust International, Inc.,**

1989). (www.vedabase.com)

—Tsu, Lao, Gia-Fu Feng, and Jane English, Tao te Ching (New York: Random House, 1997). (www.terebess.hu/english/tao/gia/html)

—Zinner, Samuel, The Gospel of Thomas: In the Light of Early Jewish, Christian and Islamic Esoteric Trajectories (London: The Matheson Trust, 2001). (www.amazon.com)

Note: All primary readings are accessible on-line with the exception of the Jewish Study Bible, the Jewish Annotated New Testament, Samuel Zinner's The Gospel of Thomas, which you will need to purchase.