



**JINDAL INSTITUTE OF
BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCES**

COURSE MANUAL

Name of the Course:

Psychology of Religion and Spirituality

Course Instructor: Neha Khetrapal, Ph.D.

Jindal Institute of Behavioral Sciences (JIBS)

3 Credit Course

Autumn **SEMESTER 2026**

Faculty Contact: Neha Khetrpal

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Office Hours:

Classroom: TBA

The information provided herein is by the Course Coordinator. The following information contains the official record of the details of the course

PART I

Course Title: Psychology of Religion and Spirituality	
Course Code	BE-E-0056
Course Duration	1 Semester (15 Weeks)
No. of Credit Units	3
Level	UG
Pre-Requisites	Nil
Pre-Cursors	Nil
Equivalent Courses	Nil
Exclusive Courses	Nil
Class Timing	TBA

Part II

Course Objectives and Content

The vast majority of our world's population describes itself as either spiritual or religious or both. While religiosity is specific to a more formal commitment to particular religious traditions and practices, spirituality is an informal adherence to transcendent meanings that may or may not arise from involvement with a religious community. Why should people be willing to follow a religion or become spiritually inclined in the absence of psychological benefits that they may reap from religious identification or spirituality? What do cognitive psychology tells us about

belief in god? Is belief in God essential for morality? Can non-religious components promote mental health and general well being for adults and even children?

To answer such burning questions, the proposed course aims to familiarize students with research on antecedents, correlates and consequences of religion and spirituality from a psychological perspective. In addition, students will also be introduced to latest research on the psychology of religion. They will be encouraged to adopt an eclectic approach for thinking about various facets of religion. The broader aim is to encourage students to make as many personal applications of course content as possible.

Learning Objectives

Presented through interactive lectures, the themes of the course are targeted at helping students:

- Develop critical evaluation of the main research methods and findings coming from the domain.
- Straddle between the science and the art of religion
- Evolve their insight into the various ways that psychologists study religion.
- Explore a cognitive approach for analysing spiritual experiences, religiosity, and atheism.
- Understand the biological and evolutionary underpinnings that form the foundations of religious beliefs and behaviour.
- Bridging the divide between psychology, as a science, and how religions are practiced and deciphered in everyday life.

Assessment Process:

The course will be majorly taught using class discussions, anecdotes, presentations, readings, and experiential exercises. The evaluations will include in-class activities, individual and group presentations, written assignments, quizzes, and projects.

Assessment:

Assessment	Weightage
Assignment	20 Marks
Project Work	20 Marks
Presentation	20 Marks
Class Activity	10 marks
End Semester Examination	30 Marks

(*Please note that absenteeism on day of assessment will not be entertained and no assessments shall be rescheduled.)

All assessment have to be handed in by the deadlines announced in class. The Assessment have to be delivered to the destination address indicated in class.

Grading Structure

COURSE LETTER GRADES AND THEIR INTERPRETATION			
Letter Grade	Percentage of Marks	Grade Points	Interpretation
O	80 and above	8	Outstanding: Exceptional knowledge of the subject matter, thorough understanding of issues; ability to synthesize ideas, rules and principles and extraordinary critical and analytical ability.
A+	75 - 79	7.5	Excellent: Sound knowledge of the subject matter, thorough understanding of issues; ability to synthesize ideas, rules and principles and critical and analytical ability.
A	70 - 74	7	Very Good: Sound knowledge of the subject matter, excellent organizational capacity, ability to synthesize ideas, rules and principles, critically analyse existing material and originality in thinking and presentation.
A-	65 -69	6	Good: Good understanding of the subject matter, ability to identify issues and provide balanced solutions to problems and good critical and analytical skills.
B+	60 - 64	5	Fair: Average understanding of the subject matter, limited ability to identify issues and provide solutions to problems and reasonable critical and analytical skills.
B	55 - 59	4	Acceptable: Adequate knowledge of the subject matter to go to the next level of the study and reasonable critical and analytical skills.
B-	50 - 54	3	Marginal: Limited knowledge of the subject matter and irrelevant use of materials, and poor critical and analytical skills.
P1	45 - 49	2	Pass 1: Pass with Basic understanding of the subject matter.
P2	40 - 44	1	Pass 2: Pass with Rudimentary understanding of the subject matter.
F	Below 40	0	Fail: Poor comprehension of the subject matter; poor critical and analytical skills and marginal use of the relevant materials. Will require repeating the course.

Course Outline:

Unit 1: Introduction (*Weeks 1, 2 and 3*)

- What is Religion?
- Bridging the gap between psychology, as science, and the real world of religion
- Display of religion in museums and heritage: myth of visual perception

Readings

1. Paloutzian, R. F., & Park, C. L. (Eds.). (2014). *Handbook of the psychology of religion and spirituality*. Guilford Publications. https://www.psychology.hku.hk/ftbcstudies/refbase/docs/zinnbauer/2005/33_Zinnbauer+Pargament2005.pdf
2. Hood, R. W. (2019). *The psychology of religion and spirituality*. In *The Routledge international handbook of spirituality in society and the professions* (pp. 7-14). Routledge. https://scholar.googleusercontent.com/scholar?q=cache:OBpYLQN5QQoJ:scholar.google.com/+psychology+of+religion+and+spirituality&hl=en&as_sdt=0,5
3. Hazard, S. (2013). The material turn in the study of religion. *Religion and Society*, 4(1), 58-78. <https://doi.org/10.3167/arrs.2013.040104>
4. Clark, I. (2016). Exhibiting the Exotic, Simulating the Sacred: Tibetan Shrines at British and American Museums. *Ateliers d'anthropologie. Revue éditée par le Laboratoire d'ethnologie et de sociologie comparative*, (43). <https://journals.openedition.org/ateliers/10300>

Unit 2: Different kinds of religion & Materiality (Weeks 4, 5 and 6)

- Prehistoric religion
- Nocturnal religion/Dark Skies
- Materiality of Religion

Readings

1. Seven sisters festival in Singapore. <https://biblioasia.nlb.gov.sg/vol-14/issue-2/jul-sep-2018/search-of-seven-sis/>
2. **Qixi Festival** (Ancient Chinese Valentine's Day) <https://www.lse.ac.uk/cibl/assets/documents/resources/sentence-of-the-week/%E4%B8%83%E5%A4%95.pdf>
3. Khetrupal, N., & Bhatia, D. (2022) Our brightly-lit future: Exploring the potential for astrotourism in Khajuraho (India). *The Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe canadien*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cag.12742>
4. Khetrupal, N. (2023). Nocturnal (dark) anthropology Spotlight on an ancient Indian civilisation. In Dunn, N., & Edensor, T. (Eds.). (2023). *Dark Skies: Places, Practices, Communities* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003408444>

Unit 3: Science and sacredness (Weeks 7, 8 and 9).

- How does the (neuro)science get entangled with religion?
- Science of Synesthesia: Sacred objects and their appeal to the science of human senses
- Ecology and religion

Readings

1. Arzy, S., Idel, M., Landis, T., & Blanke, O. (2005). Why revelations have occurred on mountains? Linking mystical experiences and cognitive neuroscience. *Medical hypotheses*, 65(5), 841-845. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mehy.2005.04.044>
2. MacLean, H. (2001). Sacred colors and shamanic vision among the Huichol Indians of Mexico. *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 57(3), 305-323. <https://doi.org/10.1086/jar.57.3.3631425>
3. Khetrupal, N. (2023). Olfactorizing religious education. *Teaching Theology & Religion*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/teth.12642>
4. Brang, D., & Ramachandran, V. S. (2011). Survival of the synesthesia gene: Why do people hear colors and taste words?. *PLoS biology*, 9(11), e1001205.

Unit 4: Religion in Modern Society (Weeks 10 and 11)

- The relationship between religion and (local) science: adopting a decolonial lens
- Differences between contemporary and ancient or prehistoric societies
- Atheism and theism in times of distress

Readings

1. Harrison, P. (2006). “Science” and “Religion”: Constructing the boundaries. *The Journal of Religion*, 86(1), 81-106. <https://doi.org/10.1086/497085>
2. Perles, Z. K. The westernization of the night sky: a study of indigenous astronomy and sky culture. <https://soar.suny.edu/handle/20.500.12648/7044>
3. Khetrupal, N. & Nanda, S. (2021). Emerging Harsh and Controlling Images of ‘God’ in Covid-19. *Religious Matters: University of Utrecht, The Netherlands*. <https://religiousmatters.nl/emerging-harsh-and-controlling-images-of-god-in-covid-19/>
4. Khetrupal, N. (2022). Pagan Multiplicity and Ecological Challenges. Religion in Public, the Centre for Religion and Public Life (CRPL), based at the School of Philosophy, *Religion and History of Science at the University of Leeds* (June 2022). <https://religioninpublic.leeds.ac.uk/2022/06/07/pagan-multiplicity-and-ecological-challenges/>

Unit 5: Developmental Science and Religion (Weeks 12 and 13)

- Do children understand religion and spirituality?
- Santa Claus, fairies and God

Readings

1. Piazza, J., Bering, J. M., & Ingram, G. (2011). "Princess Alice is watching you": Children's belief in an invisible person inhibits cheating. *Journal of experimental child psychology*, 109(3), 311-320. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jecp.2011.02.003>
2. Barrett, J. (2008). Why Santa Claus is not a god. *Journal of Cognition and Culture*, 8(1-2), 149-161. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156770908X289251>
3. Meijer-van Abbema, M., & Koole, S. L. (2017). After God's image: prayer leads people with positive God beliefs to read less hostility in others' eyes. *Religion, Brain & Behavior*, 7(3), 206-222. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2153599X.2016.1236033>

Unit 5: Artworks and Rituals (Weeks 14 and 15)

- Evolution of artworks and rituals: glimpses from evolutionary psychology
- Rituals in contemporary times: betraying science

Readings

1. Norenzayan, A., & Shariff, A. F. (2008). The origin and evolution of religious prosociality. *Science*, 322(5898), 58-62 https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/20144941.pdf?casa_token=9eAA1Z7wgfkAAAAA:BvSrix8xJ4iLEzPy7nW-zTQvICj1-my2LpSRPj0p2N_z2FJiypkABnlw9hLayvTlUD3BuUHhiz193aJ-h54Ky6U6iDw7LmAxF0Db0EtTmAwnXJ1a9QvJ
2. Xygalatas, D., Mitkidis, P., Fischer, R., Reddish, P., Skewes, J., Geertz, A. W., ... & Bulbulia, J. (2013). Extreme rituals promote prosociality. *Psychological science*, 24(8), 1602-1605. https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/23484628.pdf?casa_token=1Rbe5hLwNacAAAAA:psuOM1EO5kpsrTqqVbX9cH9IPd-gJ0NgNJ1vlXFz3MhwEznC261J2Hc-ndrpbvHn6M7cYf72pziCnmAZ9WyB0TFgvk6zBhy5avjeymSgM2MqNWE4ggV
3. Khetrapal, N. (2020). Chants of Synchrony. *coronAsur; Asia Research Institute: National University of Singapore*. <https://ari.nus.edu.sg/20331-58/>
4. Khetrapal, N. & Bhatia, D. (2022). Reconfigurations of Hindu temples and Practices in COVID-19. *The Religion Factor based at Centre for Religion, Conflict and Globalization, University of Groningen* (Sept 2022). <https://www.rug.nl/research/centre-for-religious-studies/research-centres/centre-religion-conflict-globalization/blog/reconfigurations-of-hindu-temples-and-practices-in-covid-19>

Part III

Course/Class Policies:

Professional Conduct in Classroom

You are expected to arrive on time in the classroom and follow the classroom decorum. It is expected that you are punctual in class and be seated immediately within the first two minutes so that the class can start on time. Students arriving after a ten-minute window from the designated start time will be refused entry/attendance. You are expected to participate in the classroom discussions, activities and presentation. Participation is essential in this class. You are also expected to be respectful when the instructor is teaching. Furthermore, you are welcomed to share your thoughts in the class, but you are expected to do that respectfully and be welcoming of other perspectives in the class even if you disagree with the same

Attendance Policy

Students are expected to attend all classes (100% attendance). A student who fails to attend a class is expected to inform the Course Instructor, orally or in writing, the reason for his or her absence. A minimum of 75% attendance is mandatory, failing which, student is not permitted to take the final exam or end term exam

Academic Integrity and Honesty

Learning and knowledge production of any kind is always a collaborative process. As such, collaboration demands an ethical responsibility to acknowledge who we have learnt what from, and how reading and learning from others have helped us shape our own ideas. Even originality requires an acknowledgement of the sources and the processes that helped you achieve it. Thus, any idea, sentence or paragraph you refer to or are inspired by must be cited in the piece of writing or any presentation being made. Any source from the internet, articles, books, journals, magazines, case law, statute, photographs, films, paintings, etc. must be credited with the original source. If the source or inspiration for your idea is a friend, a casual chat, something that you overheard, or heard being discussed at a conference or in class, even these must be credited. If you paraphrase or directly quote from a web source in the exam, presentation or essays, the source must be explicitly mentioned. The university has strict rules with consequences for students involved in plagiarism. This is an issue of academic integrity on which no compromise

will be made, especially as students have already been trained in the perils of lifting sentences or paragraphs from others and claiming authorship of them.

Disability Support

JGU endeavours to make all its courses accessible to students. The Disability Support Committee (DSC) has identified conditions that could hinder a student's overall well-being. These include physical and mobility related difficulties, visual impairment, hearing impairment, mental health conditions and intellectual/learning difficulties e.g., dyslexia and dyscalculia. Students with any known disability needing academic and other support are required to register with the Disability Support Committee (DSC) by following the procedure specified at <https://jgu.edu.in/disability-support-committee/>

Students who need support may register any time during the semester up until a month before the end semester exam begins. Those students who wish to continue receiving support from the previous semester, must re-register within the first month of a semester. Last minute registrations and support might not be possible as sufficient time is required to make the arrangements for support.

The DSC maintains strict confidentiality about the identity of the student and the nature of their disability and the same is requested from faculty members and staff as well. The DSC takes a strong stance against in-class and out-of-class references made about a student's disability without their consent and disrespectful comments referring to a student's disability.

All general queries are to be addressed to disabilitysupportcommittee@jgu.edu.in

Centre for Wellness and Counseling Services:

Contact: Email ID: cwcs@jgu.edu.in

Mobile: +91 8396907312

Safe Space Pledge

This course may discuss a range of issues and events that might result in distress for some students. Discussions in the course might also provoke strong emotional responses. To make sure that all students collectively benefit from the course, and do not feel troubled due to either the

contents of the course, or the conduct of the discussions, it is incumbent upon all within the classroom to pledge to maintain respect towards our peers. This does not mean that you need to feel restrained about what you feel and what you want to say. Conversely, this is about creating a safe space where everyone can speak and learn without inhibition and fear. This responsibility lies not only on students, but also the instructor.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is not acceptable! Please refrain from copying and pasting paragraphs and sentences from your reading materials. This include copying someone's words, structure, grammar, ideas, thoughts, and phrases and passing them as your own. Too many quotes are not acceptable!

What is acceptable? Using one quote which is not more than 40 words with proper citation. Use citation! It's a must! Present the content you read from your reading materials in your own words! Think and critically analyze the content! The source should be always acknowledged in your written material and presentation. All papers in this class will be checked electronically for plagiarism.

Cell Phones

Cell phones or such other devices is strictly prohibited in classroom and such activities distract other students, speakers and the instructor. Any such actions would be inducted as violation of classroom code of conduct.

Laptops and Similar Gadgets

Laptop and similar gadgets can be used in classroom only on the instruction of the professor.