

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

### 157 Comparative Religion (DVD)

Twelve Fridays, September 13, 20, 27; October 4, 11, 18, 25;

November 1, 8, 15, 22; December 6

10:00-12:00 p.m., Wallace Community Room

Rhoda MacKenzie, Facilitator

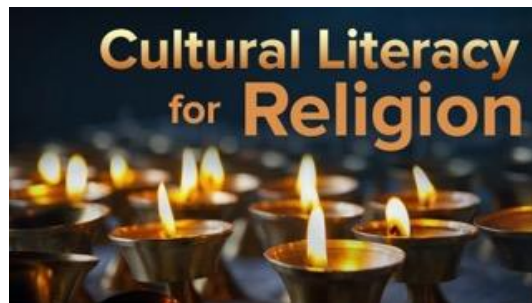
Full Title: Comparative Religion and Cultural Literacy for Religion: Everything the Well-Educated Person Should Know. Based on two DVD sets from the Great Courses catalog:

- A. **Comparative Religion**. Dr. Charles Kimball, Professor and Director of the Religious Studies Program at the University of Oklahoma.
- B. **Cultural Literacy for Religion: Everything the Well-Educated Person Should Know**. Professor Mark Berkson, Ph.D., Hamline University.

Summary: The course begins with Dr. Charles Kimball discussing what Comparative Religion is; he discusses similarities and differences between different religions. Sessions 2 through 8 are led by Professor Mark Berkson, who describes and illustrates the histories and practices of five major world religions, with briefer mention of other religious movements. Sessions 9 through 11 return to Dr. Kimball, who outlines a number of the similarities and differences that can be discerned, up to the present day. In Session 12, Professor Berkson points out the relationship between church and state in America, and how changes occurring in religions impact the health of society and the handling of violence.

Course facilitator Rhoda MacKenzie, a Diamond resident, has degrees in child psychology and religious education and has worked as a school psychologist and as an education director in churches. She has led discussion groups on a variety of topics.

*Registration \$1, Class minimum 5, maximum*



## September 13 Session 1, **Comparative Religion**

### *#1 Comparative Religion- Who, What, Why, How*

Religion can be difficult to define. This lecture introduces an approach addressing both subjectivity and the importance of understanding human religiousness.

### *#2 Exploring Similarities and Differences*

Twelve common features are found in all religions. Gain the foundation for broader inquiries about similarities and differences among Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism occurring not only between faiths, but within the same one.

## September 20 Session 2, **Cultural Literacy for Religion:**

### **Everything the Well-Educated Person Should Know**

#### *#1. Religion- Its Meaning and Importance*

Why does religion matter? Embark on a journey toward a better understanding of the world, its histories, and its cultures, as well as a better understanding of yourself and what it means to be a good citizen in a diverse global community.

#### *#2. Facets of Religion—Divinity and Devotion*

God. Divinity. Ultimate Reality. Look at how different religious traditions approach the concept of “God.” In addition to exploring the concepts of divinity, look at key components of religious devotion: scripture, ritual, ideas about good and evil, and doctrines of salvation.

## September 27 Session 3, **Cultural Literacy for Religion:**

### **Everything the Well-Educated Person Should Know**

#### *#3. Hinduism-Foundational Texts and Teachings*

Explore the history of what some scholars consider the oldest living religion. You’ll begin with the Indus River Valley civilization, and then you’ll learn key elements of the Aryan and Vedic traditions, including scriptures, the pantheon of deities, and the social caste system. Then turn to the soul—Atman—and the concept of rebirth.

#### *#4. Hindu Gods and Devotional Practices*

In this lecture, uncover new insights into the nature of divinity by studying the variety of fascinating Hindu deities, including Vishnu and his avatars, the many forms of Shiva, and forms of the goddess Devi. You’ll also look at ways Hindus worship, from chanting in temples to festivals such as Diwali.

## October 4 Session 4 **Cultural Literacy for Religion:**

### **Everything the Well-Educated Person Should Know**

#### *#6 Waking Up – The Buddha and His Teachings.*

The life of Siddhartha Gautama—the Buddha—is a fascinating journey from a wealthy and sheltered upbringing to an understanding of Samsara, the cycle of rebirth and perpetual discontent. After meditating beneath the bodhi tree, he woke up with Buddhism’s key to liberation: the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path.

#### *#7 Vehicles to Nirvana- The Schools of Buddhism*

There are three major schools of the Buddhist world: *Theravada Buddhism*, with its five precepts of ethical behavior; *Mahayana Buddhism*, the “great vehicle” that created new paths to Nirvana for its practitioners; and *Vajrayana*—including Tibetan Buddhism. Also explore the history of Tibet, the Dalai Lama, and the Tibetan Book of the Dead.

## October 11 Session 5 **Cultural Literacy for Religion....**

#### *#13 Judaism- God, Torah, and Covenant*

The world’s oldest monotheistic religion is Judaism. Explore the nature of the Jewish people, who have both a religious and an ethnic identity. At the heart of Judaism is the Torah; examine its stories, its laws, and the major figures who shaped the religion.

#### *#14 Varieties of Jewish Thought and Practice*

Review the history of the Jewish people from the first destruction of the temple 3,000 years ago to the aftermath of the Holocaust. Note varieties of Jewish culture in diaspora, from the Orthodox Judaism and Hasidism to Conservative and Reform Jews.

## October 18 Session 6 **Cultural Literacy for Religion:**

### **Everything the Well-Educated Person Should Know**

#### *#16 The Life and Commemoration of Jesus*

The New Testament depicts a man who preached love, forgiveness, and turning the other cheek. Review the major events of the life of Jesus, from birth and baptism to the Passion, and see how these events are linked to major Christian holidays.

#### *#17 Catholic and Orthodox Christianity*

How did Christianity flourish in its early years? Discover the process that led from Paul’s letters in the 1st century to Constantine’s conversion in the 4th century and the eventual formation of the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches. Then look at the theology and sacraments of Catholicism.

October 25 Session 7 **Cultural Literacy for Religion:**

**Everything the Well-Educated Person Should Know**

*#18. Protestantism and Christianity Today*

Encounter the Protestant Reformation and its central tenets—justification through faith, a priesthood of all believers, and a focus on the Bible. You'll also look at the major denominations that developed, such as Lutheranism and Methodism. Then consider various nondenominational movements in today's world: evangelicalism, fundamentalism, and liberal Christianity.

*#19 Muhammad, Qur'an, and Islamic Civilization*

Islam was founded in the 7th century by Muhammad, who received the revelation of the Qur'an. In this lecture, discover the depth and diversity of this major world religion. Along the way, hear the poetic qualities of the scripture, learn about the customs of Islam, and explore its connection to Judaism and Christianity.

November 1 Session 8 **Cultural Literacy for Religion:**

**Everything the Well-Educated Person Should Know**

*#20 Unity in Islam- The Five Pillars*

Despite its diversity, Islam is unified by the Five Pillars. Examine each in detail and witness the beliefs and rituals of Muslims: the nature of God, the ritual of prayer, the importance of giving alms, the fast during Ramadan, and the pilgrimage to Mecca. Then learn about jihad and Islamic law.

*#21 Forms of Islam—Diversity among Muslims*

The history of Sunni and Shi'a Muslims began with the question of who would succeed Muhammad after his death. Follow the historical narrative through the 18th and 19th centuries, when Muslims were forced to grapple with Western values, and examine Islam in the world today, from the Middle East to America.

November 8 Session 9 **Comparative Religion**

*# 7 Sacred Signs, Analogues and Sacraments*

Symbols are how human beings communicate. This lecture reveals how different religions employ these essential tools, not only through "representational" symbols whose meanings must be learned, but especially through "presentational" symbols whose meanings are experienced on a deeper level.

*#8 Creation Myths and Sacred Stories*

A religion's sacred stories are profoundly true to those who embrace them. One type—the creation story—is common to all religions, which have given us hundreds of such stories and myths. You learn their categories and the four functions they serve.

November 15 Session 10 **Comparative Religion**

*#20 The Way of Faith and the Way of Devotion*

Religion provides four basic paths by which faithful followers may pursue the ultimate goals: the ways of faith, devotion, disciplined action, and meditation. This lecture explores the first two, using examples drawn from Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism.

*#21 The Way of Action and the Way of Meditation.*

Disciplined action is the most widely practiced path, as shown in the legal traditions of Islam and biblical Israel and the rigid Hindu caste system. Examine disciplined meditation, a form of action practiced by Buddhists and Hindus.

November 22 Session 11 **Comparative Religion**

*#23 The Evolution of Religious Institutions.*

As religions begin to grow, structure becomes a requirement, whether for perpetuation, organization, or doctrinal clarification. The first followers of the Buddha, Jesus, and Muhammad attempted to resolve challenges through institutional structures, as often borrowed or adapted as created anew.

*#24 Religious Diversity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

Consider ways that the people of different religions understand their particular experiences and traditions in the context of religious diversity. Several examples are given of the positive and inclusive approaches that are now part of the 21st century landscape.

December 6 Session 12 **Cultural Literacy for Religion:**

**Everything the Well-Educated Person Should Know**

*#23 Religion and Law in America*

In America an important piece of cultural literacy involves understanding the Constitution and the relationship between church and state. Learn how the establishment and free exercise clauses have influenced both education and the freedom of religious practice by taking a closer look at several fascinating (and controversial) Supreme Court cases.

*#24 Religion Today – Trends, Challenges, and Hope*

Religion is a moving target, constantly changing in our modern world. This lecture examines four demographic trends and how they impact the health of both religious traditions and society at large. The lecture concludes with a consideration of the relationship between religion and violence—how violence emerges and how it can be reduced.