Just as its great rivers carve and cleanse continents, the Himalayan landscape continues to anchor and reshape religious traditions across Asia. This course provides an introduction to the unusual and enduring relationship between these particular material mountains and an impressively diverse array of dynamic spiritual practices.

Designed as a whistlestop *yatra*, the course is a guided tour of a deliberately eclectic set of specific physical locations, including peaks, lakes, cities, roads, hill-top shrines, and street-side dargahs. With each stop we will examine the manner in which Himalayan sites have acquired, transformed, and experienced traditions of sacredness. The structure of the tour enables us to follow a roughly chronological timeline, stretching from early indigenous practices to the emerging Buddhasms and Hinduisms of Lhasa, Leh, and the now-chockful Char Dham highways. This chronological approach allows us to consider the historical connections and shared intellectual genealogies behind many of Asia’s increasingly disparate religious traditions.

The locations studied vary from canonical (Lumbini) to quotidian (a small hilltop shrine just across the valley from our classroom). Particular attention is paid to sites in close proximity to where students will live and travel. The course leverages the considerable field time afforded to students by linking weekly readings and research assignments to subsequent excursions planned as part of the overall Pitt in the Himalayas program. Reading selections are taken
almost entirely from primary texts written from various positions within the religious traditions themselves.

ASSIGNMENTS

Reading Reflections: One class meeting a week (your choice), you will prepare a brief written reflection on the day’s assigned reading or film. Reflections should go beyond mere summary of a text. An effective reflection will demonstrate that you have thoroughly read and understood the text. It will develop connections between the reading and broader themes under discussion in the course. It may suggest questions for class discussion. Reflections should be about 500 words. Please submit the assignment via our online portal at least two hours before class. Be prepared to share and discuss each other’s reflections. Reflections will be graded based on evidence of careful reading, analytic and synthetic thinking, and clarity of expression.

Post-trip Reports: For two of the seven field-trips listed on the schedule below, you will prepare a brief written report re-assessing our previous week’s texts and discussion in light of your experience on the trip. Your report should include a discussion of perspectives presented by local stakeholders you engaged with on the trip (this can include discussions mediated by your trip leader). One of your written reports should be accompanied by a brief in-class presentation. Reports will be assessed on evidence of careful observation, critical thinking, and clarity of expression.

Biographies and Presentations: For the culminating project of the semester, we will each write a biography of either a person or place with a substantive connection to a religious tradition of the Himalayas. Your biography should elaborate on how a specific Himalayan setting has played a role in the development of either an individual or a community’s cultural/intellectual matrix. Biographies should make use of both first-person interviews and academic research. Each of our many field trips will provide an ideal setting to begin work on a biography. If you would like your biography to take a form other than a written narrative (a short film, perhaps), please speak to the instructor. As part of this project, you will make a formal 10-min presentation of your research and overall narrative. Specific rubrics for both the presentation and the biography will be provided separately.

GRADING

Reading Reflections (6, lowest score dropped): 30%
Post-Trip Reports: 20%
Final Presentation: 10%
Biography: 30%
Participation: 10%

SCHEDULE
### Week 1 – Meru and Kailash: Bön, Soma, and early Aryan encounters

**Readings:**

- Puruṣa Sukta and other selected excerpts from the Rg Veda (Doniger, 2009)

### Jan 17 | Trip to Songsten Library, Rajpur

**Readings:**

- Ashvagosha Dalrymple
- Buddha’s First Sermon
- Asoka’s Edicts (excerpts)

### Jan 24 – Feb 9 | Trips to Happy Valley, Majkhali, and Corbett

**Readings:**

- Ashvagosha
- Dalrymple
- Devi and Spivak
- Singh, Ch 5-6

### Feb 15 – Feb 22 | Trips to Surkanda Devi and Rishikesh

**Readings:**

- Devi and Spivak
- Singh

### Feb 27 – Feb 28 | Trip to Sainji/GEMS

**Readings:**

- Nanak, Kabir, Sur excerpts from Hawley (2008) and Mehrotra
- Watch: Had Anhad

### Mar 5 – 8 | Himalayan Healthcare Conference

**Readings:**

- Nanak, Bhakti, and the Age of Reform
- Watch: Ram ke Naam

### Mar 13 | Walking tour of places of worship

**Readings:**

- Goldstein & Kapstein (excerpts)
- Goldstein & Kapstein (excerpts)

### Mar 29 – Apr 5 | Trip to Ladakh

**Readings:**

- Student Presentations 1
- Student Presentations 2

### READINGS


