

# currents

Spring 2015

The news, people, & progress of the Graduate Theological Union



## Ancient TRADITIONS

*New Directions*

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# currents

The news, people, & progress of the Graduate Theological Union

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**On the cover:** Corridor of Hindu Temple Rameshwaram Mandir in Ramashwaram, Tamil Nadu, India. Photo Courtesy of the Dharma Civilization Foundation.

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**T**HIS YEAR, STUDENTS HAVE two more reasons to come to Berkeley and study here at the Graduate Theological Union. Beginning this fall, the GTU will be expanding the offerings in its Master of Arts program, allowing for a new concentration in Hindu Studies, as well as new options for students in Interreligious Studies. In January, we welcomed to our faculty Dr. Rita Sherma as Director of the GTU's Hindu Studies Initiative and Associate Professor of Dharma Studies. She will begin offering classes next fall and has already begun building capacity for a major conference and public programs. In this issue of *Currents*, you'll read much more about both our Hindu Studies Initiative and the new possibilities for Interreligious Studies.

To allow students greater opportunity to pursue these new programs, the GTU has extended the admissions deadline for its Master of Arts program to July 1. We are also in the midst of contacting South Asia Studies departments, professors, GTU alumni, and others to alert them to these opportunities. Perhaps you know someone who should be thinking about these learning opportunities to enrich their knowledge of Hinduism or the interconnections among the major world religious traditions? If so, please put them in touch with Dr. Andrea Sheaffer, Director of Recruitment and Admissions here at the GTU (asheaffer@gtu.edu).

Additional great opportunities are on the horizon. The GTU has been invited by two major funders to bring forward a proposal to create an innovative model for interreligious education. Part of this plan will be to develop a new way for the whole

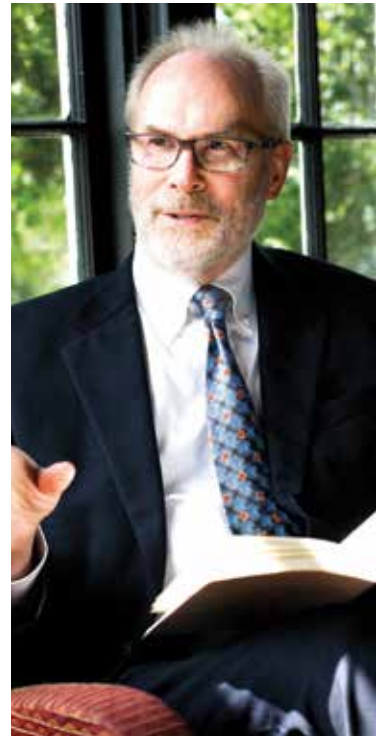
of the GTU, including its many member schools and affiliates, to focus attention on a major global issue. In our Fall 2014 issue of *Currents*, we highlighted GTU faculty, students, and alumni who are already working on climate change and the environment. Expanding our work on this topic is one possibility. We are also increasingly focused on addressing religion's potential contribution to resolving deep-seated social and ideological conflict, especially when these conflicts are rooted in religion.

As we gather practitioners of the world's religious traditions together around

the table—in classrooms, at the library, and in student lounges, scholarly journals, and Euclid Avenue restaurants—we are in a unique position to explore how these religions can speak to the global realities we face and how to deal with the commonalities and disjunctions that emerge from these divergent wisdom traditions. One of the great strengths of the GTU is that it provides a day-in and day-out platform for the sort of deep engagement that keeps partners

at the table, because the participants have chosen to be at this place of intersections.

To aid this work, classes at the GTU are supplemented by the celebration of worship, festivals, forums, conferences, and artistic performances and exhibits. We want participation by students, alumni, and wider publics at many levels—touching mind, body, and spirit as we grapple with ways that humans learn and engage in social transformation. We invite you to join the dialogue, too—in person or online. We hope to see you soon!



**This year, students have two more reasons to come to Berkeley and study here at the Graduate Theological Union.**

*Rita Patterman*





# HINDU STUDIES

## Comes to the GTU

**WE ARE PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE** that the comprehensive study of the Hindu faith, one of the world's largest religious cultures, is now available at the Graduate Theological Union. In January, the GTU welcomed renowned professor Dr. Rita Sherma as Director of Hindu Studies, as part of the launch of its highly anticipated Hindu Studies Initiative. The GTU now offers a Master of Arts degree with a concentration in Hindu Studies as well as a Certificate in Hindu Studies. These new Hindu Studies programs can be pursued independently or in combination with any degree program at the GTU. The application deadline for all MA programs has been extended to July 1, 2015.

The GTU Hindu Studies program will focus on Hindu philosophy of religion, theology, art, and sacred texts; Hinduism and world engagement in consideration of its historical and cultural contexts; and the interrelationships of Hinduism with other Indic Dharma faiths—particularly Jainism and Indian Buddhism. In accordance with the interreligious environment of the GTU, the Hindu ethos will be studied in dialogue with other religious traditions, in an effort to deepen understanding and relationships among cultures and faiths while also honoring the distinctiveness of each. With this new degree option, the GTU becomes one of the first master's degree programs in North America with a clear focus on Hindu Philosophy of Religion and Theology (which integrates art and music), as well as Hinduism engaged in global issues.

Courses on Hindu philosophy and theology have been offered occasionally at various GTU member schools over the years, but as Dr. Arthur Holder, Academic Dean and Vice President of Academic Affairs, said recently, "This is something entirely new, and it is very exciting. The GTU has entered into a partnership with the Dharma Civilization Foundation to develop a robust program in Hindu Studies here."

Three courses will be offered this fall, including "The Self and 'I' in Indic Thought," taught by Dr. Purushottama Bilimoria. Dr. Bilimoria has taught on four continents, is the editor-in-chief of the journal *Sophia*, and known internationally for his work on Indian Philosophy and Ethics, with eight edited volumes and several authored works on these and related areas. Visiting faculty Dr. Martha J. Doherty will offer the course "Foundations for a Hindu Vision of God: Introduction to Vedanta." Dr. Rita Sherma will teach "Introduction to Hinduism," as well as an interreligious course entitled, "Environmental Thought, Practice, and Eco-theology in the World's Religions."

Before joining the GTU as Associate Professor of Dharma Studies as well as Director of Hindu Studies, Dr. Sherma served for the past two years as the Swami Vivekananda Visiting Professor in Hindu Studies at the University of Southern California. Dr. Sherma is a Hindu Theologian who received her MA in Women's Studies in Religion and PhD in Theology and Ethics from Claremont Graduate University. In addition to publishing five edited volumes, she spearheaded the effort to establish the Hinduism program unit of the American Academy of Religion (AAR), is editor-in-chief of the *International Journal of Dharma Studies* by Springer, and is cofounder of the Dharma Academy of North America (DANAM) which holds its



annual meetings in conjunction with AAR.

Professor Sherma is an associate editor of the forthcoming multi-volume *Encyclopedia of Indian Religions*, which is the first comprehensive compilation of India's multifaceted religious landscape and incorporates in one work India's Hindu, Jain, Buddhist, Sikh, Islamic, Christian, Jewish, Baha'i, Primal (Tribal), and Zoroastrian religious worlds. Her latest work, *Hinduism and the Divine: A New Introduction to Hindu Theology* will be available in early 2016. At present, she is completing her book, *Ecology, Ethics, and Enlightenment*, on a contemporary Hindu ecological theology of divine immanence. Dr. Sherma is co-chair and organizer of five conferences in India in 2015 and 2016, including "The Value-Based Lifestyle," "A Common Basis of All Religions (The Golden Rule)," "Transdisciplinary Approaches to Environmental Care," "Science and Spirituality," and "Sustainable Rural Development."

GTU Alum Dr. Laurie Zoloth, in her role as President of the American Academy of Religion last year, forcefully contended that scholars in religious studies and theology have a responsibility to the world. Dr. Sherma concurs, saying, "Religion is an indispensable resource for the unparalleled struggles of our time. In an era when many view religion as a relic from a primitive past, and see science and technology as the bastions from which all solutions to planetary problems are expected to emerge, it is worth remembering that religion birthed art, architecture, music, dance, drama, philosophy, ethics, literature, and poetry. And in the case of

some cultures—including the Hindu world—medicine, astronomy, grammar, mathematics, and the contemplative sciences were generated through religious culture as well. We cannot uncritically include all elements of religious cultures which developed in a very different historical context, but critical-constructive reflection reveals much that is valuable as resources for our current situation."

Dr. Sherma points out that if we deny religion a place at the table, "we are denying humanity its greatest historic resource for transformative thought and action. This is why I am enthusiastic about the enlightened vision of GTU, which encourages us to consider the importance of religions engaging the crises faced by humanity and the biosphere with compassion and care."

At the GTU, we believe it is essential to include all of the world's great religious traditions in the conversation concerning the big issues facing humanity. We are especially pleased that the Hindu Studies program at the GTU, under Dr. Sherma's guidance, will move in the direction of interdisciplinary engagement with global concerns. Professor Sherma points out that, "Academic Hindu Studies has rarely concerned itself with the ways this vast and ancient faith may contribute to the discussion on climate change, conflict resolution, and sustainability. But here at the GTU, these issues will receive significant emphasis."

Studying the Hindu world is an adventure. Encyclopedic in its breadth and scope, it is a fascinating area of study for those who are interested in narrative literature. The longest epic poem ever written (the *Mahabharata*) is a central text, and the Hindu ethos is rich in compilations of stories where history meets legend to transmit ideals and values. It also possesses a vast range of art, which functions iconographically as theological principles at a glance. Captivating forms of Hindu sacred dance are not only modes of worship but also both meditation in motion, as well as theological transmission through performance. For those interested in Yoga philosophy, psychology, and praxis, Hindu Studies is a good place to trace the deep and diverse roots of this ancient tradition.

At the core of Hindu life is the quest for an intense and personal relationship with the Divine—variously interpreted as communion or union—and meditation is the vehicle for the journey. As such, diverse contemplative practices are available as different methods are suited to different temperaments; it is analogous to contemporary "personal diagnostics" but for spiritual

health. Of interest to many is how these contemplative practices lead to a strong ethical framework rooted in non-harming (*ahimsa*) that has been applied to every area of life. The most famous example of socially engaged contemplative practice is the life and work of Gandhi, who toiled to liberate India from British colonial rule but held fast to nonviolent political activism. All this and more will be explored under the rubric of the new Hindu Studies program at the GTU.

Many Hindus are uncomfortable with the word religion, and particularly the “ism” attached to Hindu which, some historians maintain, has its roots in the “sapta Sindhu” or seven rivers. “Hindu” was first used a millennia ago by the Persian neighbors to the north of India. Hindus often prefer terms other than *religion* to define this variegated tradition, including *Hindu Dharma*, *civilization*, or *worldview*. One reason for this discontent with the word *religion* is that it leaves out the transdisciplinary nature of the Hindu experience. In the Hindu world, scripture and empiricism are not at odds; in fact, art, aesthetics, architecture, design, drama, poetry, astronomy, Hindu traditional medicine, the science of consciousness, linguistics, psychology of emotions, and much more were and are integrated in a pattern that makes it difficult to tease apart the secular from the sacred.

“Through its Hindu Studies Initiative, the GTU is developing a leading-edge program for the multi-dimensional study of Hindu history, theology, ethics, and culture,” says Dr. Rita Sherma. “The program will offer the study of sacred texts and commentaries with both theological methodologies as well as innovative multidisciplinary approaches grounded in critical-constructive reflection.” The initiative also provides an opportunity to study and experience the rich variety of arts, performances, celebrations, and festivals that are integral to the Hindu world. Hindu Studies at the GTU will go beyond descriptive methods to an in-depth understanding of the lived experience of the Hindu faith and the ways in which it negotiates its embeddedness in South Asian realities and its increasing international presence due to growing Diasporas.

The program will offer study and research opportunities in various areas of academic focus in Hindu Studies, with particular emphases on Hindu Theology,

Indian Philosophy and Ethics, Classical and Modern Hindu Literature, Hindu Arts and Aesthetic Culture, Mahadevi (Divine Feminine) Traditions, Hindu Diaspora Studies, Yoga Studies, Hindu Thought and Ecology/Sustainability. There will also be opportunities for study and research in India.

In April, the GTU held its annual Surjit Singh Lecture on Comparative Religious Thought and Culture. This year’s lecture was preceded by a classical Indian dance performance given by Rina Mehta, founder and director of The Leela Institute for the Arts in Los Angeles. Following Mehta’s performance, Professor Anantanand Rambachan presented this year’s lecture, entitled, “*Interreligious Relations as Friendship: Mahatma Gandhi and Charles Freer Andrews*.” A Hindu theologian internationally known for decades of fruitful interreligious dialogue, Dr. Rambachan is a Professor of Religion at St. Olaf College in Minnesota. He is the author of several books, and serves on the Theolog-

*“Through its Hindu Studies Initiative, the GTU is developing a leading-edge program for the multi-dimensional study of Hindu history, theology, ethics, and culture.”*  
—Dr. Rita Sherma



ical Education Steering Committee of the American Academy of Religion.

Professor Rambachan acknowledged the importance of the GTU’s new Hindu Studies program: “The Hindu Studies program at the Graduate Theological Union is a historical opportunity to integrate the finest intellectual disciplines in the academic study of religion with a commitment to the flourishing of the Hindu tradition in our contemporary world. This unity of scholarship and commitment will alone ensure the vitality of the Hindu tradition and its contribution to human well-being.”

Dean Arthur Holder joins Professor Rambachan in celebrating this new direction for the GTU: “Many people have worked hard to bring Hindu Studies to the GTU. We can be grateful that the study of the world’s third largest religious tradition is now a part of this wonderful ecumenical and interreligious community at the GTU.”

Alan Kelchner is the GTU’s Vice President for Advancement.



## *New Options for Interreligious Studies*

**T**HE GTU IS A GREAT PLACE TO study different religious traditions. Resources abound for students interested in Christianity (Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox), Judaism, Buddhism, Islam, Confucianism, Taoism, and now Hinduism and Sikhism. But in today's increasingly pluralistic world, many students come to the GTU not to study any single tradition, but to explore the connections between two or more of them. Students may be interested in Muslim-Jewish relations, or Buddhist-Christian dialogue, or the history of interaction between Hinduism and Sikhism. Or they want to learn how different religious traditions address a critical contemporary issue such as climate change or religious violence.

In 2012, a group of GTU faculty responded to

the needs of these students by designing an Interreligious Studies area of concentration within the Master of Arts program. As they envisioned it, the purpose of this area would be "to foster the study of multiple religious traditions, their practitioners, and their expressions in different cultural contexts." Topics of focus and methodologies for this new emphasis might include "historical and contemporary relations between religious traditions, comparative theology, comparative religion, interreligious dialogue, and interreligious pastoral practices."

This new concentration on interreligious studies has already attracted a lot of interest at the GTU. Five students have completed the MA program in the Interreligious Studies area. Several more are currently enrolled, and three have applied for admission next fall. But other prospective students with interest in interreligious topics have been discouraged by the limitations previously imposed by the GTU's consortial structure. In order to make this area of study accessible for a more diverse range of students, the Council of Deans has approved some new options within the GTU's MA program.



## CTNS Announces \$1.3M Gift from the John Templeton Foundation

Until now students in this area have been required to affiliate with one of the member schools of the GTU, an option that is well suited to students who have an affinity with one of those religious communities. But what about people whose background or religious affiliation doesn't match the profile of any member school? Or what about Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, or Hindu students whose research interests are broader than the requirements of the MA program in those specialized areas of study?

Beginning in fall 2015, it will now be possible for students in Interreligious Studies to affiliate directly with the GTU, enabling them to work in closer relationship with GTU academic centers in Jewish Studies and Islamic Studies, as well as with our new Hindu Studies Initiative. In addition, students in Interreligious Studies now have the option of affiliating with the Institute of Buddhist Studies or the Patriarch Athenagoras Orthodox Institute, as well as with any of the GTU's eight member schools.

With these changes, the GTU can now provide an appropriate home base for anyone who wants to study an interreligious topic. Advising and student services will be provided by the institution of affiliation. As always, GTU students can take courses from faculty anywhere in the consortium as well as the University of California, Berkeley.

In line with our new options in Interreligious Studies and Hindu Studies, the application deadline for fall admission to the MA program has been extended until July 1. Prospective students are encouraged to contact the GTU Admissions Office by email at [admissions@gtu.edu](mailto:admissions@gtu.edu) or by calling 1-800-826-4488.

*Arthur Holder is Dean and Vice President for Academic Affairs.*

**T**HE CENTER FOR THEOLOGY AND THE NATURAL SCIENCES (CTNS) has received a \$1.3 million institutional donation from the John Templeton Foundation, one of the largest such donations in the Foundation's history. This funding will support and enhance CTNS programming as the Center transitions from being an independently incorporated organization affiliated with the Graduate Theological Union (GTU) to being an internal program unit of the GTU. The impact of this transition is enormous for both CTNS and the GTU: It gives the GTU world recognition as a stellar leader in the international and interfaith field of science and religion, while giving CTNS a permanent institutional base from which to create new programs that build on its exemplary track record and extend its work into new areas of research and public service.

According to CTNS Founder and Director, Dr. Robert John Russell, "This remarkably generous donation from the Templeton Foundation opens up, down the road, a whole spectrum of future possibilities for CTNS on the horizons of research, education, and public service in science and religion. In the immediate future this donation will cover operating expenses as CTNS becomes a more integral part of the GTU. As a GTU Program, CTNS will have a permanent institutional base that will ensure indefinitely its continued flourishing."

The transition of CTNS to the GTU brings CTNS's immense resources and widespread scholarly and public recognition to the GTU. The Center's core programs include research, teaching and public service: The Ian G. Barbour Chair in Theology and Science at the GTU offers courses at the masters and doctoral level; the 20-year history of conferences includes seven major publications with the Vatican Observatory; the scholarly quarterly journal *Theology and Science* is available online and in print to CTNS's international members; the annual J. K. Russell Fellowship in Religion and Science brings a distinguished scholar in religion and science to the GTU for research, teaching, and public service; the annual Charles H. Townes Graduate Student Fellowship offers modest financial support to GTU doctoral students specializing in theology and science. CTNS's external programs include the creation of hundreds of new courses in science and religion in research universities, colleges, and seminars internationally through its "Science and Religion Course Program" (SRCP); and sponsoring distinguished public lectures by world-class scientists through its "Science and the Spiritual Quest" program.

GTU President Riess Potterveld celebrates news of the gift. "Since its founding in 1981, CTNS has brought to the world stage issues integral to the discourse in science and religion, and has been breaking new ground through its innovative research, teaching, and contributions to the public conversation. We are delighted that this major funding from the Templeton Foundation will enable CTNS to expand its critical work even as we welcome the Center as a GTU program, and thus as an even more integral part of the Graduate Theological Union."



Dr. Robert Russell



# A Tough Mind and a Tender Heart

*Profiling Dr. Suzanne Holland,  
the GTU's Alumna of the Year*

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**S**INCE EARNING HER DOCTORATE in Religion and Society/Ethics from Graduate Theological Union, Dr. Suzanne Holland, the GTU's 2014 Alumna of the Year, has become a nationally and internationally recognized bioethicist. Her research focuses on the intersection between religion, ethics, medicine, and new genetic technologies, with an emphasis on issues of justice and feminist bioethics. She continues to reap the benefits of her time at the GTU. "I think the GTU, for me, was the best of all possible places I could have done my PhD in ethics, because it is so wide-reaching, so deep, and yet so flexible." It was here where she learned that, "in the study of ethics, we really need to have what Martin Luther King Jr. called tough minds and tender hearts. That's what ethics is all about: tough minds and tender hearts. You have to marshal each in service of the other, in order to bring about the work of social justice—which is why I do social ethics. I'm grateful to have learned this from my mentor at the GTU, Karen Lebacqz."

Dr. Holland is currently the John B Magee Professor of Science and Values in the Department of Religious Studies at University of Puget Sound, where she has served since completing her PhD in 1997. She also fills the roles of Professor of Ethics, and Director of the Program in Bioethics. In addition, Dr. Holland teaches in the Gender & Queer Studies Program and the Honors Program at the University of Puget Sound

and holds a faculty appointment as Affiliate Professor of Bioethics & Humanities at the University of Washington's School of Medicine.

Dr. Holland's interest in bioethics emerged in the midst of her master's work in biblical studies at Louisville Presbyterian Seminary. "I'd read a newspaper article about this guy who wanted his head frozen after he died, in hopes that it could be reattached to some other body in the future so his genius would be preserved. And I thought, why would anybody want to do this? Can science really bring us immortality?" She went to all her seminary professors requesting guidance for how to begin thinking about her questions. "Nobody could give me a satisfactory answer, and so that is what drove me into the study of ethics. I didn't have answers to these kinds of questions. So I switched my focus from biblical studies to bioethics, and I specifically came to the GTU to study with Karen Lebacqz."

The Graduate Theological Union provided the framework Dr. Holland sought. "I am so grateful to the GTU, and to my mentors there, for helping give me the tools to do what I can do to make the world more just. I think what I'm always after is that I do my little part of changing the world, which is that I'm able to replace the period at the end of a sentence in the mind of a student with a question mark. And when the question mark happens, the door opens." She continues, "I know students are changed when they have begun to unpack and disentangle the normative assumptions they've always had about what's right and what's wrong, who's in and who's out. I think that's a way in which I'm trying to pursue social justice, and perhaps to change the world one person at a time, or one classroom at a time." Dr. Holland also pursues justice in larger ways, as an active member of the American Civil Liberties Union of Washington State where she served

*“I know students are changed when they have begun to unpack and disentangle the normative assumptions they’ve always had about what’s right and what’s wrong, who’s in and who’s out.”*



as a member of the Board of Directors for 10 years.

“The hallmark of the GTU is its collegial atmosphere,” and this environment, she recently reflected, “helped frame for me a way of being as a scholar. In fact, my scholarship today is marked by co-authored, collaborative pieces; I prefer to write collaboratively. And that’s something I first encountered at the GTU.” Dr. Holland has partnered with other scholars on several books since graduating from the GTU, including her most recent work, *Achieving Justice in Genomic Translation*, as well as *The Human Embryonic Stem Cell Debate*, the first book on stem cell ethics which she co-edited with Karen Lebacqz and fellow GTU alumna Laurie Zoloth. She carries this passion for partnership into the classroom, encouraging her students to work together on joint projects, because, as she says, “we don’t do enough of that work in the academy, and I think that the GTU was a good model for this approach.”

Dr. Holland embodies the very best of what the GTU seeks to develop in its scholars. Her upcoming book, *Technologies of Desire*, explores the ways in which Westerners, especially Americans, use biotechnologies of the body to fulfill fundamental human desires—desires for children, for better bodies, for avoiding old age and death. In this work, Holland considers the way in which marketing and advertising create a hyper-culture of desire that blurs the

distinction between needs and wants.

Dr. Holland is very excited about the Graduate Theological Union’s increasing emphasis on interreligious studies, acquisition of new academic centers, and continued growth. “I think it is fantastic; our world needs this kind of interreligious dialogue. So much of the suffering in the world, currently, is that we don’t seem to know how to have those kind of dialogues. We need to all be able to learn from each other, and I think that’s the most valuable thing about the GTU.” Dr. Holland praises the GTU for its continued advancement as a unique institution for interreligious study. “I think that there’s no place like the GTU in that regard. We have to know how to have these conversations, these intellectual explorations. The GTU is leading the way in this—and that makes me hopeful.”

Regarding GTU’s recognition of her significant contributions to the field of ethics, superior impact on the lives of her students, and her dedication to excellence, Dr. Holland continues to be extremely grateful. “I just want to say to the GTU that, with this award, which I’m amazed by and humbled by, I feel like I really stand on the shoulders of giants, because they’re giants to many people: people like Clare Fischer, Mary Hunt, Laurie Zoloth. It’s truly humbling to have this award, and I couldn’t be more amazed, or more grateful.”

*Suzanne E. Miller is a doctoral student in Biblical Studies and communications assistant for the GTU.*





# *in the Mess*

**E**NVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION, AIR pollution, animal extinction...how can we be good caretakers of our planet without becoming overwhelmed by the magnitude of these issues? How can scholars and religious communities respond to the call issued by 2014 president of the American Academy of Religion and GTU alum, Dr. Laurie Zoloth, to help fight climate change?

bris as it washes ashore. Guided by the motto, “beauty first,” the Langs bring attention to the problem of plastic pollution by creating colorful and sensitive artwork out of these plastic remnants.

Because the Langs' process is archaeological in nature—involving collecting, cleaning, sorting, and organizing artifacts—they are the perfect guest artists for the summer exhibition presented by the GTU's Center for the Arts, Religion, and Education (CARE) in collaboration with the Badè Museum of Biblical Archaeology (Pacific School of Religion). In this annual summer exhibition series entitled "Mining the Collection," CARE invites guest artists to work with Badè curators to explore the Museum's Iron Age Tell en-Nasbeh collection for inspiration.

This year, CARE is proud to present the art of Judith Selby Lang and Richard Lang in "Mining the

Collection: Finding Meaning in the Mess.” While the Langs’ artwork is on display in the Doug Adams Gallery, artifacts from the museum collection will be on display in the Badè Museum. CARE’s annual “Mining the Collection” summer exhibition series is inspired by Fred Wilson’s transformative “Mining the Museum” project at the Maryland Historical Society (1992), which involved presenting traditional museum collections in an alternative light, engendering new understandings.

While the Langs’ work ranges from large collages to jewelry pieces, they often compose arrangements of plastic fragments—based on color, shape, or both—to create large-scale prints. The plastic pieces can then be re-sorted for re-use in future works.

In their artists’ statement for “Mining the Collection: Finding Meaning in the Mess,” the Langs note:

*Our search for meaning has taken us from the beach to this august institution, and rightly so. The search for meaning swings toward theology as a way of making sense of an untidy universe.*

*During our 20-year long project we’ve been on an ongoing quest to find out how an aesthetic mind transforms plastic pollution into something meaningful, something beautiful to see. Along the way we’ve met the texts of powerful thinkers like Mary Douglas, Emile Durkheim, and Mircea Eliade, who all probe the question, what is allowed inside the Temple, the sacred space, and what must remain outside as the profane, as the “dirt?” We wonder if there is an alchemy in the creative process linked to transformative action?*

Judith and Richard speak of alchemy, but most of us can’t turn dross into gold. We can, however, emulate the Langs in thinking about the environment as sacred space and in wrestling with the theological implications of our disregard for environmental stewardship. The people of Tell en-Nasbeh left us pottery shards and ceramic figurines, but the plastic legacy we leave to future generations will be far more damaging than informative.

For Judith Selby Lang and Richard Lang, art is a means of engagement. We are drawn to their artwork by the beauty of their compositions, then shocked to discover that the source of the beauty is garbage. Their work is a call to action, reminding us of our responsibility to care for our environment and to think about steps we can each take to reduce our participation in our “throwaway” culture.

*Elizabeth Peña is the executive director of the Center for Arts, Religion, and Education.*



*Lemon Man 24" x 20"*

## ***Mining the Collection: Finding Meaning in the Mess***

**June 9 – August 28, 2015**

**Doug Adams Gallery**

**Badè Museum of Biblical Archaeology**

**1798 Scenic Avenue • Berkeley, CA**

**Opening reception: Tuesday, June 9, 5-7 pm**



*Shovel Bands 20" x 24"*

# Politics, Passion, and Pluralism

## A conversation with Dr. Shibley Telhami

**D**R. SHIBLEY TELHAMI (MA, 1978) is the Anwar Sadat Professor of Peace and Development at the University of Maryland, College Park, and a non-resident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. A respected scholar, Dr. Telhami has also served as advisor to the US Mission to the UN (1990-91), as advisor to former Congressman Lee Hamilton, and more recently as senior advisor to George Mitchell, President Obama's US Special Envoy for Middle East Peace (2009-2011).

Shibley Telhami received his Master's Degree in Philosophy and Religion from the Graduate Theological Union, before moving on to complete his PhD in Political Science at University of California, Berkeley. We spoke recently with Dr. Telhami about his experiences at the Graduate Theological Union, his appreciation for the importance of interreligious education, and the reasons he continues to support the GTU.

**How was your educational experience at the GTU unique, and how did the research you performed here contribute to your academic success?**

The program I put together at the GTU was unique from the very start. It occurred in partnership with Berkeley's Department of Philosophy. My advisor at GTU was William McClendon, a theologian writing about philosophy, language, and religion. Over at Cal, Benson Mates, then the chair of the philosophy department, provided guidance for me, and I also studied with John Searle, a philosopher of language. That experience clearly provided me with a line of analysis that informed my work in terms of how I thought about religion and politics and eventually separated them.

One of the thinkers who most impacted my thinking is Søren Kierkegaard. Over the decades, Kierkegaard has influenced many, but for different reasons. For me, his work on the complexity of the self, inspired my thinking about identity, which has been a subject of personal as well as professional interest for me. I

was introduced to his work when studying with Arnold Comb, then president of the San Francisco Theological Seminary, who is a Kierkegaard expert. I have an approach to the study of identity that I apply in political science that was informed by Kierkegaard's thinking.

Intellectually, grounding at the GTU helped inform my work. During my time of research at GTU, I decided that religion itself isn't the source of problems in the Middle East region, which continued to attract my personal and professional attention during a decade of war and peace. I had started with the assumption that religion was a primary source of conflict, but moved away from that understanding. I began to realize the key approaches to understanding conflict in the Middle East were economic and political, more than they were religious.

I was exposed to thinking about politics, religion, and society at a macro level, and this was very important intellectually for developing my frame of reference. Even my earlier studies in mathematics, which provided me with an analytical framework, contributed to a disciplined way of examining issues that you get out of mathematics and philosophy. And my understanding of religion was extremely important because, as significant developments occurred in the Middle East over the past three decades, many analysts sought to connect them to religion. But having studied and spent time there and understanding the languages led me to exactly the opposite conclusion; not that religion is not important—it continues to be central in people's lives—but it's not the source of the problem. And so that provided me with a unique understanding of this intersection between religion and politics, particularly after 9/11. One of the first articles I wrote on the topic of terrorism was an article entitled "It's Not About Faith" which also made its way into my best-selling book, *The Stakes: America and the Middle East*.

**What values do you believe can be learned by studying in an interreligious environment?**

One of the big things we face now is the question of pluralism. We know people are passionate about religion. Anybody who thinks religion is irrelevant really

doesn't understand the way the world works. Of course it's relevant. It may not be the cause of the problem or the sole explanation for why people do what they do. But there are a lot of people who care a lot about their set of beliefs and feel very strongly about them. I don't think many people now believe that, faith-wise, we can wall ourselves off from the rest of the world. But in order to get there one must contend with people who are not identical to us in their view of the world and who have different belief systems about which they feel very deeply.

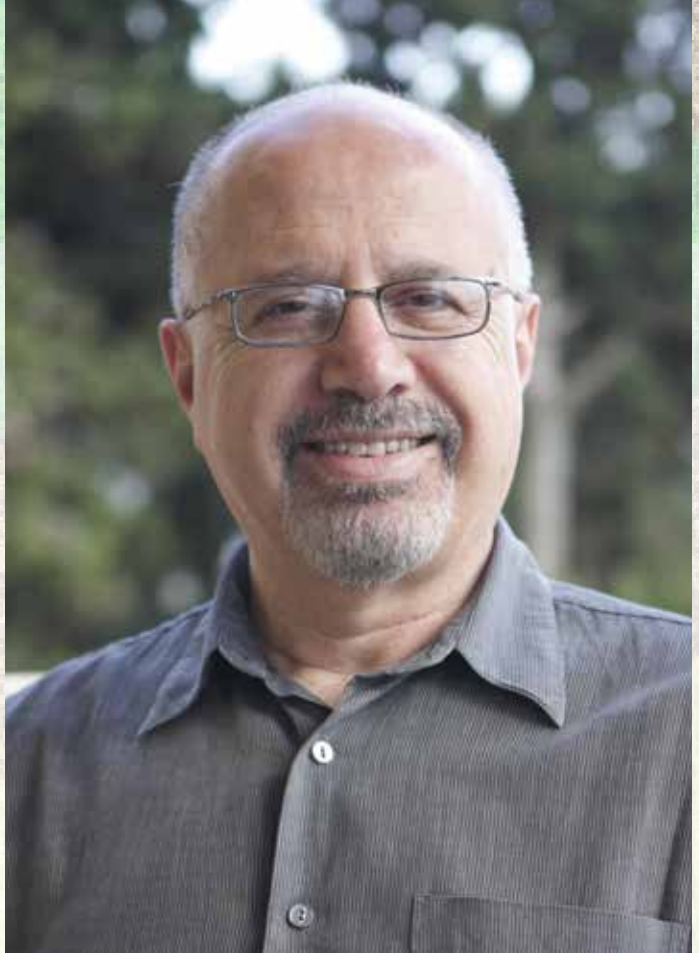
So having a pluralistic environment is really essential for understanding how you can relate to others while still holding deep beliefs of your own. And I think one of the advantages of the GTU is in creating an environment that is conducive to understanding what we now are facing in much of the world, which is, the multiplicity of cultures and belief.

### **How do you see the GTU's Center for Islamic Studies as a distinctive center for post-graduate theological education?**

I think the presence of a center like that at an institution like the GTU is indispensable. It was a major thing that the GTU moved to strengthen itself under the leadership of Jim Donahue and the opening of the center created a lot of possibilities. I was just talking about how important it is to have that diversity of views. Certainly, it seems like a breakthrough just to have a diversity of Christian views under one place (laughs) which then starts pushing to Buddhist, Jewish, and beyond. And clearly the Muslim religion and faith is so central in our world today. We have almost a billion and a half Muslims. The issues concerning the relationship between the West and the East are not, at the core, primarily about religion. But to understand that the issues are not in the end religiously based, you have to understand religion.

### **In what ways do you see your annual charitable contributions to the GTU as an investment?**

The GTU is a wonderful institution and has certainly helped me early on in my career and I am happy to give back. My own contributions are modest. But the more important thing to me is not really about the amount you donate, it's more about signaling your support. And in that sense my hope is not necessarily tied to any specific program or that my donation



will buy something practical, but that my gift is understood as a vote of confidence.

### **Any final comments about the GTU that you would like to share?**

I am very pleased to see that GTU is expanding its diversity, particularly the news about the establishment of the new master's concentration in Hindu Studies. I think the GTU's continuing to expand its pluralistic environment is essential, because we have all come to learn how misconception about the other can exacerbate conflict. I can tell you that confidently, because we do a lot of polling in the Middle East and also here in the U.S. We poll views about the Middle East, religion, views of the West, and American views not only of the Middle East but also of Islam. What is interesting is that when you ask people who have studied the region, or if they've studied in the United States, or if they had visited or spent time in a place, and or even if they just know the language, you find their views are much more realistic about the other rather than negative. And that is because of the familiarity, which is extremely important for normalizing the discourse, and grounding it in analytical reasoning instead of grounding it in fear and misconception. The more students, faculty, and the wider community are exposed to that diversity, the better off we all are.

*Christopher Cox is the associate director of development at the GTU.*



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*"So much of the suffering in the world is that we don't seem to know how to engage in interreligious dialogue. We need to be able to learn from each other, and I think that's the most valuable thing about the GTU. We have to learn how to have these conversations, these intellectual explorations. The GTU is leading the way in this—and that makes me hopeful."*

—Dr. Suzanne Holland, 2014 GTU Alumna of the year

Your financial support is vital to keep the GTU's engagement with the world's religious traditions vibrant and fruitful, and to sustain our scholars as they continue to do exceptional work. Will you support this essential work with a gift today?

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## Upcoming Events

### CircumNavigators

Art Exhibit by Christel Dillbohner & Danae Mattes

Until August 15, 2015

Flora Lamson Hewlett Library, 2400 Ridge Rd., Berkeley

### Mining the Collection: Finding Meaning in the Mess

Mixed media exhibition featuring the work of  
Judith Selby Lang and Richard Lang

June 9 – August 28, 2015

Doug Adams Gallery /

Badè Museum of Biblical Archaeology

1798 Scenic Avenue, Berkeley

### 17th Biennial Conference of the International Association of Shin Buddhist Studies

Hosted by The Institute of Buddhist Studies

August 6 - 9, 2015

Jodo Shinshu Center, 2140 Durant Avenue, Berkeley

All events are open to the public, unless noted.  
Visit [www.gtu.edu/events](http://www.gtu.edu/events) for more information.