

SYLLABUS

Religion 370: Religion Seminar

Spring, 2006

Contemplative Spirituality: Buddhism and Christianity

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3:30-4:00

Course Description. This seminar will examine the philosophy and practice of contemplation in Buddhism and Christianity; the relationship of contemplative practices to the broader spiritual paths; community and solitude as contexts for practice, and inter-religious dialogue. In addition to texts on contemplation from each tradition, we will read and discuss collections of talks by and transcripts of dialogues between Buddhist and Christian spiritual leaders. The contemplative arts we will examine include mindfulness meditation, centering prayer, spiritual reading, and the use of visual, vocal, written, and bodily forms of expression and cultivation. We will touch upon the use of contemplative practices in clinical settings to promote mental and physical health. Students will be expected to practice one or more of these arts and keep a journal on their practice. Short writing assignments, presentations and research papers.

Course Orientation: Research and Writing. A contemplative seminar differs from the traditional academic seminar in that it seeks to balance “first person” research based on one’s own involvement with contemplative practices and “third person” research based on socially available resources: books, journals, Internet sites, interviews, data collection, etc. Writing reflects the above division in research sources: writing that reflects on, records, and expresses the inner life; writing that explores, organizes, analyzes, and synthesizes externally derived data. Genres associated with the first source: journal writing, creative writing, expressive writing, free writing. Examples of the latter are notebooks (with some exceptions) and papers (formal essays, research papers).

Components and Evaluation.

Journal (20%)

Please purchase a small-sized journal/diary. The journal will function as a daily record of your experiences with meditation and for spiritual writing growing out of the process of *lectio divina* both when narrowly and broadly applied. The style and content of the entry will vary depending on the type of practice and writing in which you are engaged. You might also use it to record other experiences or reflections that arise outside of the formal practice time. The journal will be collected periodically and graded in terms of substance and also evidence of serious and continuous engagement with the and to a lesser degree in terms of style and grammar.

Notebook (20%)

Please buy a thick, large-sized notebook and use it frequently and extensively. The notebook will be used for taking notes and registering comments on the readings and class discussions, for free-writing and prewriting. Kindly reserve the margins for comments by the instructor. Notebooks may be collected without advance notice and graded.

Research Paper (26%)

One research paper worth 25%. Select from one of the following:

- *a classic in the Christian or Buddhist contemplative traditions or
- *a contemplative art developed or inspired by Christianity or Buddhism e.g. meditation practices, *lectio divina*, calligraphy, rosary, Jesus Prayer, martial arts, chant, the tea ceremony, poetry
- *a spiritual figure or writer in either contemplative tradition
- * a comparative study

A thesis or proposal statement must be approved by the instructor. A draft of each paper is to be read and critiqued by another member of the seminar, a writing center tutor, or the instructor. A copy of the draft must be provided the instructor. MLA and APA styles acceptable. Please refer questions to the Bedford Handbook before seeking help elsewhere. 10++ pages.

Thesis date: Feb. 28; Draft Date: April 13; Due Date: April 20.

Two Essays. (34%)

I. An essay on Mindfulness Meditation in two parts. The first part will summarize the views of Jon Kabat-Zinn, M.D. on the benefits of Mindfulness Meditation as set forth in *Full Catastrophe Living*.

The second will narrate you own experiences with mindfulness meditation including conclusions you might have on its efficacy.

Due Date: Tuesday, March 14

II. An essay in the form of a collection of *pensees* or thoughts emerging from *lectio divina* and similar spiritual reading practice. You can select, edit, reframe and add to the best reflective writings from your journal.

Due Date: Monday, April 3

Participation/Attendance

Since this is a seminar, students are expected to attend and participate. Significant lack of either may result in a grade adjustment.

Contemplative Practices

Foundational Meditation

Students will be instructed in mindfulness-based meditation practice and will be expected to practice daily for at least ½ hour. Although mindfulness meditation is rooted in the Buddhist tradition, the practice itself, like yoga and T'ai Chi, can be used in a non-ideological context and thus adapted to serve a variety of needs and purposes (spiritual, physical, psychological, social). Christian monks have incorporated it into their practices; psychologists and physicians have incorporated it into theirs.

We will use it as a disciplined “first person” approach to the study of the contemplative life. If conscientiously practiced, meditation will help us develop a more open and yet attentive state of mind as well as a more embodied sense of self. The weeks spent in practice should also make us more sensitive to later texts on the contemplative life from both the Buddhist and Christian traditions.

Both the CD Mindfulness Meditations and the book *Full Catastrophe Living* are based on the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program now operating in numerous medical centers and clinics across the country. Students will use the CD under the guidance of the instructor. Assignments from *Full Catastrophe Living* will provide context, direction, and advice concerning the practice. Other works will be suggested for general reading or to answer particular questions.

A meditation journal will be kept to record your experience with the practice and its effects and to raise questions you wish to explore in class or privately about the practice. The journal can also be used for expressive writing stimulated by experiences attributable to or enhanced by these practices..

Focused Practices

Christian practices that can, if used appropriately, lead to silent meditation or contemplation such as *lectio divina*, centering prayer, the Jesus Prayer, prayer beads/rosary, chant, etc

Buddhist Meditation. An overtly Buddhist practice following more fully instructions found in classical texts and/or the teachings of reputable contemporary “masters.” Mostly *vipassana*.

Some of the above practices can be adapted to or are already present in another form in other religious or secular settings. Students who for reasons of conscience choose not to engage in an overtly Christian or Buddhist practice, may substitute a similar practice from a different religious tradition, adapt the practice to an acceptable spiritual context, or substitute a practice or practices from a humanistic context.

THE COURSE WILL BE DIVIDED ACCORDING TO FOUR CANONICAL
HOURS

LAUDS: A MAJOR HOUR

(January 17 to February 9)

Read: During this Hour, we will read and discuss *Prayer: A History* by Philip and Carol Zaleski and instructional chapters from *Full Catastrophe Living* by Jon Kabat-Zinn.

Meditate: We will begin to learn some basic meditative practices using the CD *Mindfulness Meditations* by Cohen-Katz and Wiley as our main but not only resource.

Write: Students will be expected to keep a journal recording meditative practice: dates, times, observations, and any pertinent or impertinent reflections. A notebook (see above) will also be maintained.

A. This letter designates the reading assignment due for the date.

B. This letter designates the reading to be done sometime after but on the same day as the class and the daily practices to be started that day.

Tuesday, January 17

A. No assignment

B. Read: Kabat-Zinn, Ch.

Do: Exercises 1 and 2, p. 58

Thursday, January 19

A. Read: Zaleski, Ch. 1

B. Read: Kabat-Zinn, Ch. 4

Do: CD "Awareness of Breath" at least once per day

Tuesday, January 24

A. Read: "The Devotee," Zaleski, pp. 128-144 and "Jesus Prayer" (Handout)

B. Do: CD. Add "Awareness of Body and Sounds" to practice

Thursday, January 26 (meet in the Movement Room, Johnston Hall)

A. Read: "The Devotee," Zaleski, pp. 145-157 and "Brother Lawrence" (Handout)

B. Do: "Awareness of Body and Sounds" and "Awareness of Breath" Daily

Tuesday, January 31

A. Read: "The Contemplative," Zaleski, pp. 195-208 & Handout

B. Do: "Awareness of Thoughts"

Thursday, February 02 The Amish and Music.

Guest: Prof. Hilde Binford

A. Read: "The Amish" (Handouts)

B. Do: "Awareness of Thoughts"

Tuesday, February 04 (Meet and sing with Old Order Amish in Hearst Hall, South Campus)

A. Read: Merton "The Rain and the Rhinoceros" and "What Contemplation Is Not"

B. Do: "Awareness of Thoughts"

Thursday, February 9

A. Read: "The Contemplative," Zaleski, pp. 208-228

B. Do: "Mindfulness Bells"

Tuesday, February 14 (Meet in Comenius 213)

A. Read: "Prayer and Mod. Arts," Zaleski, Ch. 9 (276-end)
"The Ecstatic" (pp.171-179 (Teresa of Avila)

B. Read: "Walking Meditation" Kabat-Zinn, Ch. 7

Do: "Mindfulness Bells" and Walking Meditation (No CD)

PRIME: A MINOR HOUR

(February 16 to March 02)

Read: We will look more closely at traditional Buddhist meditation texts and a modern respected interpreter. *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation* will be used and supplemented where helpful.

Meditate: A continuation of Mindfulness meditation but now with a more contextualized understanding. Additional practices such as that of loving-kindness (metta).

Write: Notebook on the readings, in-class activities. Journals will be kept on the practices.

Thursday, February 16 Introduction to Buddhism

A. Read: "Buddhism" (On Reserve)

B. Do: CD "Mindfulness Bells" or Walking Meditation at least once per day.

Tuesday, February 21 Mindfulness and the Dharma

A. Read: Thera, Chs. 1 & 3 and pp.117-132

B. Do: CD "Awareness of Thoughts" or "Mindfulness Bells"

Thursday, February 23 Insight Meditation

A. Read: Thera, Chs. 5 & 6

Or, Mahasi Sayadaw, "Insight Meditation"

B. Do: CD "Cradling the Heart"

Tuesday, February 28

A. Read: "The Thirty Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva" Gyalse Togme

B. Do: "Cradling the Heart" or Walking Meditation .

Thesis Statement Due

Thursday, March 02
Read: Buddhist Spiritual Writing (On Reserve)

March 7 and 9. SPRING BREAK

NONE
(March 14 to 23)

Read: During this hour we will study and practice the monastic art of reading sacred texts. We shall also explore other methods of spiritual reading and writing. Readings on *lectio* will come from both online sources, from *The Gethsemani Encounter*, and reserved readings.

Meditate: We will continue our meditation practices as begun in LAUDS (perhaps “Meditation Bells” or a Breath-Centered practice. We will add *lectio* each day after initial instruction. According to scholastic manuals, such a practice moves through four stages: *lectio* (reading a text and then focusing on a phrase or word that “speaks” to you), *meditatio* (reflections on the passage or chosen words), *oratio* (affective response or prayer), and *contemplatio* (resting in unity above words, presence of God). Should a student feel uncomfortable with the Scriptural/Prayerful aspects of *lectio*, alternative or revised methods based in other appropriate literature will be accepted. Discuss with instructor.

Write: Students will add reflective and creative writings on their practice of *lectio* to their entries on mindfulness meditation. Entries should include the passages used, the words focused on, and the “flavor” of the last two stages, *oratio* and *contemplatio*).

Tuesday, March 14 . *Lectio Divina*: Two Views
Guest: Mother Laura Howell, Episcopal Priest
Read: Funk and Hall
Do: Select passages from Scripture according to guidelines
First Essay Due

Thursday, March 16. Spiritual Reading/Writing
Read: Select from Suggested List
Do: Practicing the Stages

Tuesday, March 21. Spiritual Reading/Writing
Read: Select
Do: Follow instructions on Centering Prayer or Spiritual Reading

Thursday, March 23. Centering Prayer and *Lectio*
Read: Keating and Pennington (Online)
Do: Continue *Lectio* and Centering

Tuesday, March 28. Reading and Centering

Read: Pennington and Keating (Online)

VESPERS: A MAJOR HOUR

(March 30 to April 27)

Read: Talks and discussions from the noted meeting between Buddhist and Catholic contemplative practitioners/scholars at the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky.

Meditate: Select a practice already engaged in or a new one for this last section.

Write: Notebook entries on readings and in-class discussions. Journal entries on practices.

Thursday, March 30. Spiritual Growth: Buddhism & Christianity

Read: Gethsemani, pp. 78-98

Monday, April 03. **Second Essay Due**

Thursday, April 6. Growth and Development: Christianity

Read: Gethsemani, pp. 82-98

Tuesday, April 11. Community and Spiritual Guidance: Buddhism

Read: Gethsemani, pp. 111-124

Thursday, April 13. Community and Guidance: Christianity

Read: Gethsemani, pp. 124-134

Final Draft of Research Paper Due

Tuesday, April 18. Mind and Virtue

Read: Gethsemani, Chapter Seven

Thursday, April 20. Method and Experience

Read: Gethsemani, Chapter Eight

Research Paper Due

Tuesday, April 25. Tragedy and Transformation

Read: Gethsemani, Chapter Nine

COMPLINE

Thursday, April 27. Group Wrap-up