

Religious Studies 300

Spirituality West and East

Fall 2004

Professor Mark W. Muesse

Spirituality West and East is an investigation of spiritual practices across the world's religions. The course will examine seven interrelated themes from a wide range of spiritual disciplines: (1) cultivating awareness, (2) disciplining the body and purifying the mind, (3) developing virtue, (4) seeing god, (5) expressing devotion, (6) making journeys, and (7) erasing concepts. Study will involve the discussion of primary and secondary texts as well as practical engagements with the disciplines themselves.

Goals:

- To understand the nature and significance of spirituality in human life.
- To become acquainted with the principal forms of spirituality in the world's religions.
- To develop an in-depth understanding of some of these spiritual forms by study and practice.
- To support the development of your personal spirituality by encouraging commitment to specific disciplines.
- To reflect on the effectiveness of the personal engagement of spiritual disciplines as an academic method.

Texts:

Venerable Henepola Gunaratana, *Mindfulness in Plain English*, expanded and updated edition, Wisdom Publications, 2002.

Anthony Bloom, *Beginning to Pray*. New York: Paulist Press, 1970.

Bhikkhu Bodhi. *The Noble Eightfold Path: Way to the End of Suffering*. Seattle: Pariyatti Publications, 2000).

The Rule of St. Benedict. Ed. Timothy Fry, OSB. New York: Vintage Books, 1998.

Sharon Salzberg, *Lovingkindness : The Revolutionary Art of Happiness*. Shambhala, 2002.

Stephen P. Huyler, *Meeting God: Elements of Hindu Devotion*. Yale University Press, 1999.

Michel Quenot, *The Icon: Window on the Kingdom*. St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1992.

Shems Friedlander, *Rumi and the Whirling Dervishes*. New York: Parabola Books, 2003.

The Way of a Pilgrim and the Pilgrim Continues His Way, reprint edition. Trans., Helen Bacovcin. Image Books, 1985.

The Cloud of Unknowing. Ed., James Walsh. Paulist Press, 1988

Other photocopied readings will be distributed.

Course Requirements

You may take this course in one of two ways. You may pursue the **scholastic path**, in which you are required to study and discuss a collection of readings, practice a set of exercises, and fulfill certain written assignments. Or you may pursue the **enlightenment path**, in which you complete the same requirements as the scholastic path as well as follow a spiritual regimen that you develop in consultation with the professor. The enlightenment path will be its own reward. Although it involves more work, you will not receive additional extra academic credit. You may, however, use the additional practice to inform the final summative project (see below). Thus for the purposes of this course, the scholastic and enlightenment paths will be graded in the same way.

The requirements for the **scholastic path** are as follows:

20%~Preparation, participation, and contribution. It is important that each person come to class adequately prepared, having read the assignments and thoughtfully considered them. Since the course is discussion-intensive, is essential that you contribute to the colloquia. Furthermore, you are expected to participate actively in the course's practical engagement with specific disciplines. These engagements include field trips for observation as well as personal spiritual practices. Participation and contribution to the course will count 20% of the final grade.

25%~Quizzes. There will be 17 unannounced short quizzes during the course of the semester. These quizzes will test your comprehension of the day's reading material. There will be no make-ups for missed quizzes, but I will drop the two lowest quiz scores. Your quiz average will count 25% of the final grade.

30%~Writing Assignments. You will be asked to submit three essays, each approximately three pages in length, typed double-spaced, at various times during the semester. The essays are designed to give you an opportunity to respond critically and creatively to the reading material, discussions, and engagements. They are expected to be mechanically and grammatically correct. Each essay will count 10%.

25%~Summative Project. The summative project is to be a substantial work reflecting a semester long engagement with the course material and experiences. It may be a conventional research paper exploring in depth a course issue of personal interest, utilizing sources beyond class literature. Or it may be another kind of written work, such a journal, a short story, a play, or a collection of poems or speeches. It may also be a multi-media presentation or a work of art. I place a premium on creativity and originality. By 15 November, you should have met with me to discuss the project and establish its parameters. The summative project will be due on the last day of classes, 8 December.

The additional requirements for the **enlightenment path** are as follows:

Submit a proposal for a semester-long program of spiritual cultivation by 8 September. The proposal should be an outline of a discipline or a set of disciplines that you intend to follow on a regular basis through the semester. For instance, your discipline may be to fast one day each week or to practice mindfulness meditation for 30 minutes each day. The description of the course lab will provide other possibilities. The program must also include monthly meetings with the professor for reflection and evaluation. In the proposal you should explain your purpose for choosing and pursuing the particular discipline or disciplines and state what you believe you will accomplish.

Incompletes

An incomplete grade may be given to a student who is unable to complete the required coursework because of illness or other extenuating circumstances. Students wishing to receive an incomplete must consult with me prior to the final examination. Upon my approval, the student must submit the appropriate application to the Registrar before final grades are due. All unfinished work must then be completed and submitted to me by the end of the second week of the following semester.

Attendance Policy

Many important features of this course will be imparted in class meetings, through lectures, films, and discussions. It is essential, therefore, to attend class. Students will be permitted three absences during the semester. Absences beyond that will result in a reduction in the final grade.

Electronic Communication

I encourage you to check your e-mail frequently for announcements and other matters concerning this course. I will use the e-mail to communicate with you collectively and individually. It is often easier to contact me through e-mail than by telephone. My e-mail address is muesse@rhodes.edu. All PowerPoint presentations will be available on the Academic Departments and Programs fileserver: <\\Fileserver1\acad_dept_pgm\Relig_Studies\Muesse_Mark\Public/>.

Office Information

I am happy to meet with you for any reason. My office is located in 411 Clough. You may drop in during office hours: MWF, 10:00-11:00 AM; TTh, 1:00-3:00 PM. If these times are not

convenient for you, please call or e-mail me to make an appointment for another time. My campus extension is 3909, and my home number is 278-0788.

Course Outline

Structure: The course is divided into seven themes representing some of the principal methods for attaining spiritual fulfillment in the world's religions. In some cases, we will examine the theme from the perspective of two or more traditions; in other instances, time permits only the viewpoint of one.

Date	Topic and Assignment
25 August	Introduction to the Course
27 August	Beginning the Journey: What is Spirituality?
C U L T I V A T I N G A W A R E N E S S : M E D I T A T I O N A N D P R A Y E R	
30 August	Mindfulness Meditation Theory Gunaratana, <i>Mindfulness in Plain English</i> , 1-78.
1 September	Mindfulness Meditation Practice Gunaratana, <i>Mindfulness in Plain English</i> , 79-113.
3 September	Mindfulness Meditation Gunaratana, <i>Mindfulness in Plain English</i> , 115-175.
6 September	Labor Day
8 September	Mindfulness Meditation Proposal for Enlightenment Path due.
10 September	Prayer Bloom, <i>Beginning to Pray</i> , 1-51.
13 September	Prayer Bloom, <i>Beginning to Pray</i> , 55-106
15 September	Does Prayer Really Work? Dr. Manoj Jain

TBA

DISCIPLINING THE BODY,
PURIFYING THE MIND:
ASCETICISM

- 17 September **The Way of the Buddha**
Bodhi, *The Noble Eightfold Path*, vi-27.
- 20 September **Right Behavior**
Bodhi, *The Noble Eightfold Path*, 29-60.
- 22 September **Realizing Wisdom**
Bodhi, *The Noble Eightfold Path*, 61-120.
- 24 September **Christian Monastic Practice**
The Rule of St. Benedict (entire).
- 27 September **Community Meal**
- 29 September **Skillful Thinking in Buddhism**
Vitakkasanthana Sutta; Muesse, "Taking Responsibility
for Our Thoughts," 31-33.
- 1 October **Skillful Thinking in Early Christianity**
Evagrius Ponticus, *The Praktikos*, 3-42.
First essay due.

DEVELOPING VIRTUE:
COMPASSION, GENEROSITY, FORGIVENESS

- 4 October **Metta Meditation**
Salzberg, *Lovingkindness*, vii-viii; 1-61.
- 6 October **Metta Meditation Practice**
Salzberg, *Lovingkindness*, 62-118.
- 8 October **Metta Meditation**
Salzberg, *Lovingkindness*, 119-193.
- 11 October **Metta Meditation Practice**

S E E I N G G O D :
I C O N O G R A P H Y

- 13 October **Hindu Spirituality**
Huylers, *Meeting God*, 10-63.
- 15 October **Hindu Theology and Ritual**
Huylers, *Meeting God*, 64-155.
- 18 October **Fall Break**
- 20 October **Representing the Divine**
Huylers, *Meeting God*, 156-231
- 22 October **Utter Renunciation**
Film: "Spiritual India"
Huylers, *Meeting God*, 232-250.
- 25 October **Field trip to India Cultural Center**
- 27 October **Christian Iconography**
Quenot, *The Icon*, 7-62.
- 29 October **How to Read an Icon**
Quenot, *The Icon*, 65-119.
- 1 November **Gospel through Image**
Quenot, *The Icon*, 121-165.
- 3 November **Field Trip to St John Orthodox Church**
Second Essay due.

E X P R E S S I N G D E V O T I O N :
P O E T R Y , D A N C E , M U S I C

- 5 November **Introduction to Sufism**
Film: "The Sufis"
Schimmel, "What is Sufism?" 3-22; Friedlander, *Rumi and the Whirling Dervishes*, 1-29.
- 8 November **Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi**

Friedlander, *Rumi and the Whirling Dervishes*, 30-68; 153-157.

10 November

Rumi the Poet

Selection of Rumi's poems

12 November

Sema: The Whirling Dance

Film: "The Wings of Love"

Friedlander, *Rumi and the Whirling Dervishes*, 70-127.

15 November

Music and Spirituality

Friedlander, *Rumi and the Whirling Dervishes*, 129-151.

Deadline for discussing summative project proposals.

**M A K I N G J O U R N E Y S :
P I L G R I M A G E**

19 November

Unceasing Prayer

The Way of a Pilgrim, 7-94.

22 November

The Labyrinth

Class meets at Evergreen Presbyterian Church,

Fellowship Hall

Third Essay due.

24 November

Thanksgiving

26 November

Thanksgiving

29 November

Unceasing Prayer

The Way of a Pilgrim, 97-175.

**E R A S I N G C O N C E P T S :
M Y S T I C A L W R I T I N G**

1 December

"What You Don't Know..."

The Cloud of Unknowing, 99-173.

3 December

Theological Ignorance

The Cloud of Unknowing, 173-217.

6 December

Mysticism and Mystery

The Cloud of Unknowing, 218-266.

8 December

Recollections and Reflections
Summative Project due.

Laboratory

An integral aspect of this course will be a set of required and optional exercises comprising what might be considered a laboratory component. We will devote a significant amount of class time to engaging and discussing these exercises, and you will be expected to dedicate time outside of class to fulfilling them. They are as important, and perhaps even more important, than the reading that you will do.

Required:

- Learn the fundamental techniques of Buddhist sitting and walking meditation.
- Practice a day of complete verbal silence.
- Practice a day of right speech.
- Fast for a 24 hour period.
- Abstain from all media (newspapers, television, radio, Internet news) for one week.
- Prepare and eat a communal meal in mindfulness (a class activity).
- Listen to a collection of sacred chant.
- Attend an Orthodox Christian liturgy.
- Take a field trip to the India Temple and Cultural Center.
- Attend a Friday mosque service.
- Learn Buddhist techniques of developing compassion.
- Learn the techniques of purifying the mind.
- Walk a labyrinth.

Optional:

- Make a weekend or fall break retreat at a monastery.
- Help the poor.
- Feed the hungry.
- Visit the sick.
- Keep a vigil.
- Make an icon.

How I Grade Essays

Writing and critical thinking are, I believe, the most important parts of a liberal arts education. I therefore take essay writing very seriously and make it a significant part of your final grade. In grading students' essays, I take care to mark them as accurately and as painstakingly as possible.

My own experience tells me that one's writing cannot improve unless mistakes are clearly pointed out. Learning to write well is hard work and takes much practice. In this sense, we are all beginners.

To help you in your writing practice for this course, I have outlined below the general principles I use in assessing grades for essays. I readily admit that grading essays—especially papers in the humanities—involves subjective judgments, particularly in the area of content. Ultimately, the grade you receive is the consequence of a judgment part objective and reasonable, part intuitive and aesthetic. In general, I try not to evaluate the particular position or point of view you express; rather, I look at how well you have argued that position, how fully and sympathetically you have considered alternative views, how logical and coherent your point of view is. In the final analysis, I am not really interested in whether or not you believe in God, for example, but I am very interested in *why* you believe or do not believe.

A—The A paper is, above all, interesting and effectively written. It demonstrates knowledge of the subject and evidences much thought about it. It is clearly structured and has a carefully argued thesis. The A paper is outstanding in all respects: it is devoid of any mechanical, grammatical, or typographical mistakes. Formal errors will reduce a paper's grade, regardless of content.

B—The B paper is missing some element that distinguishes the A essay. Perhaps the paper demonstrates sufficient knowledge and thought, but the presentation is pedestrian. Perhaps the content is thoughtful and interesting, but the essay suffers from mechanical or typographical mistakes.

C—The C paper fulfills the terms of the assignment without distinction.

D—The D paper is uninteresting, lacking in comprehension, and flawed by mechanical errors.

F—The F paper is without merit. It is flagrantly lacking in insight and comprehension, and appears insufficiently acquainted with academic standards for written work.

Some Hints for Better Writing

I expect proper form for papers in the humanities (*MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, fourth edition). I prefer footnotes, but endnotes or parenthetical notes are acceptable. Parenthetical notes should be included within the sentence (the period follows the closed bracket, like this).

Feel free to use the first person.

Do not use the passive voice unless it is absolutely necessary.

Use inclusive language: that is, do not use “man” or “mankind” as the generic term for all of humanity (humankind, humans).

Create an interesting title.

Use “that” and “which” appropriately. (“Which” generally follows a comma.) Use “who” when you are talking about a human being.

If a quotation is more than three lines long, it should be indented and single-spaced, omitting the quotation marks.

Use two spaces between sentences.

Avoid vague abstractions like “the Church.” Specify exactly what you mean.

Paginate (Number the pages!).

Do not use the word “feel” as a substitute for “think.”

Try to avoid inappropriate use of slang (e.g., “It really sucked to be a slave in Egypt.”)

Quote the dictionary only if absolutely demanded by the context. Ordinarily, Webster is not an authority in this course. Never begin an essay with “According to Webster’s Dictionary....”

Always edit. I rarely receive a paper that cannot be improved by eliminating verbiage. Get a pencil (or edit online) and see how many words you can cross out. At the same time, watch for typos, misspellings, and grammatical mistakes. Remember, a computer spell-checker will help with many words, but does not help with the specialized vocabulary that is part of this course.

Always keep a copy of your paper. Please staple the paper in the upper left corner. Do not waste your money on plastic or paper report holders. They are useless, and I will merely throw them away.

When you receive your graded paper, read it carefully. I spend much time and energy grading these essays and usually provide detailed commentary. You will not profit by our efforts~yours and mine~unless you review the graded essay. Always feel free to talk to me about the paper, both before and after it is graded. If you do not understand why the paper receives the grade it does, then we should talk. The essay is only part of what I hope is a semester-long dialogue.

If you are serious about improving your writing skills, you may wish to consult:

William Strunk, Jr. and E. B. White, *The Elements of Style*, 3rd edition, New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1979.

Walters and Kern, “How to Eschew Weasel Words,” *Johns Hopkins Magazine* (December 1991).

Natalie Goldberg, *Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within*, Boston: Shambhala, 1986.

