

# Religious Studies 258

## Spirituality West and East

Fall 2006

Professor Mark W. Muesse

Spirituality West and East is an investigation of spiritual practices in the world's religions. This course will focus attention on what religious people *do* in addition to what they believe or think. We will examine a wide variety of spiritual practices within each of four traditions: Buddhism, Islam, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Hinduism. Our 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:

Bhikkhu Bodhi. *The Noble Eightfold Path: Way to the End of Suffering*. Seattle: Pariyatti Publications, 2000). Available online at <http://www.vipassana.com/resources/8fp0.php>.

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

Leonard Koren, *Wabi Sabi for Artists, Designers, Poets, and Philosophers*. Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 1994.

*Four Huts: Asian Writings on the Simple Life*. Trans., Burton Watson, Boston: Shambhala, 2002.

Reynold A. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam*. New York: Arkana, 1989.

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

*The Way of a Pilgrim and the Pilgrim Continues His Way*, trans., Helen Bacovcin. Image Books; Reprint edition, 1985.

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

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

Eknath Easwaran, *Gandhi the Man: The Story of His Transformation*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Tomales, CA: Nilgiri Press, 1997.

Other photocopied readings will be distributed at various points in the course.

### Course Requirements

**20%--Participation:** 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 also essential that you contribute to the colloquia.

The participation grade will be partly determined by 7 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 lowest quiz score. The quiz average will be one-half of the participation grade. The other half will be based on your contributions to the class discussions and activities.

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. You will be also expected to participate in the planning and implementation of one community activity (Ceremonial Tea or the Community Supper).

**60%--Writing Assignments:** You will be asked to submit six brief essays (2-4 pp.) 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.

**20%--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, 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 8 November, you should have met with me to discuss the project and establish its parameters. The last five days of the course will be devoted to presenting the summative project to the class.

### 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**

It is essential to attend class. What you learn from the lectures and discussions goes well beyond what can be measured on tests, so simply mastering the test material is not sufficient for the successful completion of the course. Accordingly, I do not reckon absences as excused or unexcused. If you choose to miss class to participate in an extracurricular or other activity, your choice indicates the priority you give to this course and the grade you receive will reflect that decision. Each student is permitted three absences during the semester without an adverse effect on the grade. After the third absence, however, each subsequent absence will lower the final numeric average by one point. Twelve absences will thus drop an 87 to 78.

### **Grace**

You may have observed it's not a perfect world, and from time-to-time, we all need a little slack. I recognize this. There may come a time when you need to turn in a late paper or need some other slight bend of the rules. You can count on *one* act of grace during the semester to help get you back on track. But since I'm not god, my supply of grace is limited. Don't count on getting too much slack.

### **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](mailto:muesse@rhodes.edu).

### **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, 2:00-4:00 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**

#### **I N T R O D U C T I O N**

- |           |   |
|-----------|---|
| 23 August | <b>Welcome to the Course</b>  |
| 25 August | <b>Beginning the Journey: What is Spirituality?</b><br>Saint-Laurent, "Understanding Spirituality Generally" and<br>"Understanding Religious Spirituality," 1-38. |

#### **B U D D H I S M**

- |           |  |
|-----------|--|
| 28 August | <b>Lecture: The Way of the Buddha</b><br>Bodhi, <i>The Noble Eightfold Path</i> , vi-27. |
|-----------|--|

30 August	<b>Right Behavior</b> Bodhi, <i>The Noble Eightfold Path</i> , 29-60.
1 September	<b>Realizing Wisdom</b> Bodhi, <i>The Noble Eightfold Path</i> , 61-120.
4 September	<b>Labor Day</b>
6 September Bellingrath Chapel	<b>Mindfulness Meditation Theory</b> Gunaratana, <i>Mindfulness in Plain English</i> , 1-78.
8 September Bellingrath Chapel	<b>Mindfulness Meditation Practice</b> Gunaratana, <i>Mindfulness in Plain English</i> , 79-113. Essay due
11 September Bellingrath Chapel	<b>Mindfulness Meditation</b> Gunaratana, <i>Mindfulness in Plain English</i> , 115-175.
13 September	<b>Buddhist Aesthetics</b> Koren, <i>Wabi Sabi for Artists, Designers, Poets, and Philosophers</i>
15 September	<b>The Simple Life</b> Watson, <i>Four Huts</i>
18 September	<b>Ceremonial Tea</b> Wabi Sabi presentations
<b>I S L A M</b>	
20 September	<b>Lecture: Introduction to Islam</b> Readings TBA.
22 September	<b>The Sufi Path</b> Film: "The Sufis" Nicholson, <i>The Mystics of Islam</i> , 1-49.
25 September	<b>Enlightenment in Sufism</b> Nicholson, <i>The Mystics of Islam</i> , 50-101.
27 September	<b>Fana</b> Nicholson, <i>The Mystics of Islam</i> , 102-168.
29 September	<b>Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi</b> Friedlander, <i>Rumi and the Whirling Dervishes</i> , 1-68; 153-157.
2 October	<b>Rumi the Poet</b>

Selection of Rumi's poems, TBA  
 Essay due

4 October

**Sema: The Whirling Dance**  
 Film: "The Wings of Love"  
 Friedlander, *Rumi and the Whirling Dervishes*, 70-127.

Thursday, 5 October  
 5:00-7:00 PM

**Community Supper**  
 East Village Lodge

## EASTERN ORTHODOXY

9 October

**Lecture: Introduction to Eastern Christianity**  
 Readings to be distributed.  
 Essay due

11 October

**Christian Iconography**  
 Quenot, *The Icon*, 7-62.

13 October

**How to Read an Icon**  
 Quenot, *The Icon*, 65-119.

16 October

**Fall recess**

18 October

**How to Write an Icon**  
 Kh. Susan Cushman, local iconographer

20 October

**Gospel through Image**  
 Quenot, *The Icon*, 121-165.

23 October

**Unceasing Prayer**  
*The Way of a Pilgrim*, 7-94.

25 October

**Field Trip to St John Orthodox Church**  
 Fr. John Troy Mashburn, pastor

27 October

**Unceasing Prayer**  
*The Way of a Pilgrim*, 97-175.  
 Essay due

30 October

**The Labyrinth**  
 Fisher Garden

## HINDUISM

1 November	<b>Lecture: Introduction to Hinduism</b>
3 November	<b>Hindu Spirituality</b> Huyler, <i>Meeting God</i> , 10-63.
Saturday, 4 November 11:00 AM	<b>Field trip to India Cultural Center and Temple</b>
8 November	<b>Hindu Theology and Ritual</b> Huyler, <i>Meeting God</i> , 64-155. Deadline for discussing summative project proposals
10 November	<b>Representing the Divine</b> Huyler, <i>Meeting God</i> , 156-231 Essay due
13 November	<b>Utter Renunciation</b> Huyler, <i>Meeting God</i> , 232-250.
15 November	<b>Gandhi and the Practice of Non-harming</b> Film: "Gandhi" Easwaran, 5-103.
17 November	<b>Gandhi and the Practice of Non-harming</b> Easwaran, 104-171.
20 November	No class Essay due
22 November	<b>Thanksgiving</b>
24 November	<b>Thanksgiving</b>
27 November	<b>Student Presentations</b>
29 November	<b>Student Presentations</b>
1 December	<b>Student Presentations</b>
4 December	<b>Student Presentations</b>
6 December	<b>Student Presentations</b>

## Laboratory

An integral aspect of this course will be a set of 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.

- 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).
- Tea Ceremony (a class activity).
- Practice the Five-Times prayer of Islam.
- View icons at St John Orthodox Church (<http://www.stjohnmemphis.org/>).
- Take a field trip to the India Temple and Cultural Center. (<http://www.icctmemphis.org/>)
- Walk a labyrinth.

### 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.