

Religious Studies 258

Spirituality West and East



Rhodes College

Fall 2010

11:00 AM, Tuesdays and Thursdays

Professor Mark W. Muesse

Religious Studies 258

Spirituality West and East

Spirituality West and East is an investigation of spiritual practices in the world's religions. Unlike most other comparative religions courses, this course will focus attention on what religious people *do* rather than what they believe or think. We will examine a wide variety of spiritual practices within each of four traditions: Buddhism, Hinduism, and Eastern Christianity, and Islam. Our study will involve the discussion of primary and secondary texts as well as practical engagements with the disciplines themselves.

Goals

These are goals of the course:

- 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

Henepola Gunaratana. *Eight Mindful Steps to Happiness: Walking the Buddha's Path*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001.

Susan Murcott, First *Buddhist Women: Poems and Stories of Awakening*, 2nd ed., Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2006.

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

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

Ekhnath Easwaran, *Gandhi the Man: The Story of His Transformation*, 3rd ed., Tomales, CA: Nilgiri Press, 1997.

Bhagavad Gita: Krishna's Counsel in Time of War. Trans., Barbara Stoler Miller. New York: Bantam Books, 1986.

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

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

Philokalia: The Eastern Christian Spiritual Texts. Trans., G.E.H. Palmer, *et al.* Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths, 2006, 2008.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Garden of Truth: The Vision and Promise of Sufism, Islam's Mystical Tradition.* New York: HarperOne; reprint edition, 2008.

Shems Friedlander, *Rumi and the Whirling Dervishes.* Morning Light Press; rev ed., 2003.

Other readings are available online. The course will also use a variety of video resources. They are available on [Moodle](#).

Course Requirements

The requirements for the course are:

Participation: 10%

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. See **Grades for Class Participation** for information about grading class contributions. 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 (the Wabi Sabi Tea or the Dervish Lodge).

Quizzes: 10%

There will be 11 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.

Writing Assignments: 60%

You will be asked to submit four essays 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 is worth 15% of the final grade.

Summative Project: 20%

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 as 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 12 November, you should have met with me to discuss the project and establish its parameters.

Course Policies

Attendance Policy

It is essential to attend class. What you learn from participating in the colloquia goes beyond what can be measured on papers and other forms of evaluation. 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 two absences during the semester without an adverse effect on the grade. After the second absence, however, each subsequent absence will lower the final numeric average by one point. Missing one-third of the class sessions (9 for TTh classes) will result in an automatic failure in the course.

Electronic Devices

The use of laptop computers, cell phones, and other media players is not permitted in class. All electronic devices must be turned off and kept off table tops and desks.

Written Assignments

All work submitted for this course should be the product of your own efforts. Students are expected to abide by the [Honor Code](#).

Late papers will not be accepted unless you have made prior arrangements with me. Otherwise, five points will be deducted from the grade for each day the paper is late.

Guidelines for “Writing a Paper in Religious Studies” can be found on the [Religious Studies web page](#). See **How I Grade Essays** (attached below) for more information and helpful hints to improve writing. For additional assistance, visit the Writing Center in 212 Barret or the [Center’s web page](#).

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 due date of the final paper. 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 by the end of the second week of the following semester.

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 photocopied readings and PowerPoint presentations will be available at:
\\Fileserv1\acad_dept_pgm\Relig_Studies\Muesse_Mark\Public\Spirituality West and East.

Grace

You may have observed that it is 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 want 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.

Office Information

My office is located in 411 Clough. You may drop in during office hours: MW, 9:30-11:00; 1:00-2:30. If these times are not convenient for you, please call or e-mail me to make an appointment for another time. My campus number is 901 843 3909, and my home number is 901 278 0788.

Course Outline

INTRODUCTION

- 26 August **Welcome to the course**
- 31 August **What is Spirituality?**
 Read:
 Saint-Laurent, [“Understanding Spirituality Generally”](#) and
 [“Understanding Religious Spirituality,”](#) 1-37.

BUDDHISM

- 2 September **The Buddha's Path**
 Read:
 Gunaratana, *Eight Mindful Steps to Happiness*, 1-55.
 View:
 [The Buddha.](#)

- 7 September **The Buddha's Path**
Read:
 Gunaratana, *Eight Mindful Steps to Happiness*, 57-108.
- 9 September **The Buddha's Path**
Read:
 Gunaratana, *Eight Mindful Steps to Happiness*, 109-192.
- 14 September
Bellingrath Chapel **The Buddha's Path**
Read:
 Gunaratana, *Eight Mindful Steps to Happiness*, 193-256.
- 16 September **Buddhist Saints**
Read:
 Murcott, *First Buddhist Women*, 15-104.
- 17 September
5:00 PM *Essay Due*
- 21 September **Buddhist Saints**
Read:
 Murcott, *First Buddhist Women*, 105-217.
- 23 September
East Village Lodge **Buddhist Aesthetics**
Read:
 Koren, *Wabi Sabi* (entire).

#HINDUISM

- 28 September **Introduction to Hinduism**
Read:
 Huyler, *Meeting God*, 10-89.
View:
 [330 Million Gods](#).
- 30 September **Introduction to Hinduism**
Read:
 Huyler, *Meeting God*, 90-173.
- 5 October **Introduction to Hinduism**
Read:
 Huyler, *Meeting God*, 174-253.
- 7 October **The Gita**
Read:
 Bhagavad-Gita (entire)

9 or 10 October Attend:
Puja, [India Cultural Center and Temple](#)
12005 Highway 64 E., Eads, TN

12 October **A Hindu Saint**
Read:
Easwaran, *Gandhi the Man*, 11-103
View:
[Gandhi](#)

14 October **A Hindu Saint**
Read:
Easwaran, *Gandhi the Man*, 104-171.

15 October
5:00 PM *Essay Due*

19 October **Fall Recess**

EASTERN ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY

21 October **Introduction to Eastern Orthodox Christianity**
Read:
Lossky, [The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church, 7-22](#); Dionysius the Areopagite, ["Introduction," 158-161](#); ["Mystical Theology," 173-180](#); Lossky, [The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church, 23-43](#).

23 October Attend:
6:00 PM Great Vespers, [St. John Orthodox Church](#)
1663 Tutwiler

26 October **Orthodox Iconography**
Read:
Quenot, *The Icon*, 7-83.

28 October **Orthodox Iconography**
Read:
Quenot, *The Icon*, 83-165.

2 November **Orthodox Saints**
Read:
The Way of the Pilgrim, 13-94.

4 November **Orthodox Spirituality**
Read:
Philokalia: The Eastern Christian Spiritual Texts (entire).

9 November **Orthodox Saints**
 Read:
 Ware, [“The Fool in Christ”](#)
 View:
 [Ostrov](#)

SUFISM

11 November **Introduction to Sufism**
 Read:
 Nasr, *The Garden of Truth*, xiii-58.
 View:
 [Islamic Mysticism](#)

12 November *Essay Due*
 5:00 PM

16 November **Introduction to Sufism**
 Read:
 Nasr, *The Garden of Truth*, 59-102.

18 November **Introduction to Sufism**
 Read:
 Nasr, *The Garden of Truth*, 103-159.

23 November **No Class**

25 November **Thanksgiving Break**

30 November **A Sufi Saint: Rumi**
 Read:
 Friedlander, *Rumi and the Whirling Dervishes* (entire).
 View:
 [Rumi: The Wings of Love](#)

2 December Attend:
 5:00 PM Dervish Lodge

3 December *Essay Due*
 5:00 AM

CONCLUSION

7 December **Review and Reflection**

10 December **Final Projects Due**
3:30 PM

Optional Engagements:

22-24 October Gandhi-King Conference, <http://www.gandhikingconference.org/>

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.

Grades for Class Participation

"A" Range:

- Consistently demonstrates mastery of content and context of readings through careful preparation and analysis.
- Connects daily readings to recurring themes of the course by contrasting and comparing them with past readings; makes and adequately defends judgments about texts and ideas; consistently raises questions and highlights issues of importance connected to the readings.
- Initiates discussion; listens respectfully to the ideas and opinions of others and responds in a way that benefits the discussion rather than dominates it.
- Always arrives on time for class.

"B" Range

- Frequently demonstrates attention to content and context of readings by raising good questions about texts and ideas.
- Shows improvement over the semester in understanding texts and their significance and connecting daily assignments to past readings; makes and adequately defends judgments about texts and ideas; often raises questions and highlights issues of importance connected to the readings.
- Listens respectfully to the ideas and opinions of others and responds in a way that benefits the discussion rather than dominates it.

"C" Range

- Does not always complete assigned readings prior to class; is unable or unwilling to engage in discussions and/or respond to questions or raise questions related to the readings.
- Makes connections between texts rarely and with difficulty; makes judgments about texts and ideas based solely on opinion or feeling; demonstrates little grasp of the overall significance of the readings and makes little effort to investigate further their significance.
- Waits for others to initiate discussion and usually speaks only when called upon.

"D" Range

- Is minimally prepared for class, having only scanned the reading assignments if at all; consistently fails to bring assigned materials to class and shows no sign of engagement with the texts prior to class.
- Makes indefensible connections between reading and/or judgments about the readings that are free from thoughtful analysis; is uninterested in the significance of the readings apart from passing the course.
- Is passive in class; shows little respect or interest in the points raised by peers and the professor.
- Forgets to turn off cell phone before class.
- Whispers or writes notes to other students during class

Learn and Live: Some Thoughts about Teaching

Teaching is an act of faith. I have long given up the expectation that I will see and enjoy immediate results in my teaching. The things I really want students to know—how to live well, how to be and do good, how to think about the wonders of the world and the mysteries of being alive—are not things that can be measured by tests, grades, or evaluations. I can only hope that my influence will someday have a salutary effect in their lives and that consequently I will contribute modestly to making the world a better place.

Accepting that the real value of my teaching is manifested in the future has transformed my way of thinking about what I teach and how I teach it. Five years—maybe five weeks!—after my course, most students will have little recollection of the material we studied. But they will remember me. For better or worse, the way I comport myself, treat others, and approach the business of learning is what makes an indelible impression. The Hasidic tradition of Judaism relates the story of Leib Saras who returned from a visit to his rabbi and was asked by family and friends what words of Torah he learned. Leib Saras replied, “I did not go to my teacher to hear his words of Torah; I went to see how he ties his shoelaces.” I am very much aware that many of my students are there to see my shoelaces, and those who aren’t, observe them anyway.

What I want my students to see in me is a real individual who aspires never to stop learning, a person who struggles to understand the world and to live a life of genuineness and sincerity, one who often falls short of that aspiration and gets discouraged, and yet tries again. It is more important to me that they regard me as a master of learning than as a master of a subject. As teacher, my goal is to be the best student in the classroom. I want students to learn from me how to learn, how to teach themselves, and to see the value of never giving up the spirit of inquiry and curiosity.

Foremost among my pedagogical aspirations is humility, but I confess this is more an ideal than a reality. I have come to prize humility as the greatest of virtues, but I lament how far away from me it often is. Humility is imperative to the work of learning, and hence of teaching. The students I have found to be the hardest to teach are those who lack humility; it is difficult to inspire someone who thinks he or she already knows. Seeking to be humble as a teacher means recognizing my own limitations both as student (there are still so many things I do not

know and never will) and about how best to encourage and inspire others to learn. Being humble means striving to keep learning how to teach.

I have also come to embrace the virtue of risk and its companion courage, although, again, I make no special claims to having attained either. I have learned that becoming a better teacher means risking innovation, trying out new approaches and new ideas. Taking pedagogical risks has to be done with courage, because it is quite possible to fail.

But I'm consoled by the words of one worthy philosopher: "You can ultimately succeed only at unimportant things. The loftiest things in life often end in failure." Because learning and teaching are among the most important things in life, it is inevitable that we will sometimes fail at them. The best teachers, I believe, make that moment the occasion for another lesson.