

STMA 520: Spiritualities: East and West
Spring, 2008
Instructors: Valerie Lesniak and Jamal Rahman

Course Description:

“Until sight converges from more than one angle, the world looks as flat as a postcard. The rewards of having two eyes are practical, they keep us from bumping into chairs and enable us to judge the speed of approaching cars. But the final reward is the deepened view of the world itself.”

Houston Smith

This course is designed to view **the spiritual life** from the different angles of several traditions. It will expose the participant to an **experiential appreciation** of the major traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity and Islam. The participants will design a personal spiritual program that incorporates practices and insights from these traditions. The course is an effort to aid the cultivation of *sapientia* as well as *scientia*, of wisdom and knowledge. To facilitate this end, classroom time will be divided between group process and discussion, teaching and actual prayer practice.

Course Objectives

1. To develop an **appreciative understanding** of the traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.
2. To reflect on insight from the traditions that enhance and deepen one's own faith and beliefs.
3. To study, experience and then possibly incorporate worship practices, meditations, and techniques from different religions that blends in well with one's unique personal spiritual practices.
4. To experience a spaciousness in one's mind and heart by becoming aware of the wealth of insights and practices from the diverse traditions.

Required Reading:

Brown, Patricia. **Paths to Prayer: Finding your Way to the Presence of God.** Jossey-Bass, 2003.

Corcoran, Nancy, **Secrets of Prayer: A Multifaith Guide to Creating Personal Prayer in your Life,** Skylight Paths Publishing, 2007.

Easwaran, Eknath. **Meditation.** Nilgiri Press. 1991.

Galland, China. **The Bond Between Women: A Journey to Fierce Compassion.** Riverhead, 1999.

Hanh, Thich Nhat. **Living Buddha, Living Christ.** Riverhead. 1995.

Rahman, Jamal. **The Fragrance of Faith: The Enlightened Heart of Islam,** The Book Foundation, 2004.

Smith, Houston. **The Illustrated World Religions.** Harper. 1995.

Teasdale, Wayne. **The Mystic Heart: Discovering a Universal Spirituality In the World's Religions.** New World Library, 1999.

Prior to Weekend 1, - Students should acquaint themselves with the books by Smith, Brown and Corcoran. By acquaint we mean read pertinent sections associated with the description of the scheduled themes of the block syllabus below. (i.e. Smith on Hinduism, Taoism Buddhism) Please read Rahman and Easwaran and the first half of Teasdale.

Please do some type of note keeping, journaling, scrape booking, or highlighting of each of the texts so that you will be able to participate in class room discussions.

Prior to Weekend 2. - Students should read the entire books of Galland and Hanh.

The Brown, Corcoran, Smith and Teasdale books will be used during both weekends.

Tentative Schedule:

Weekend One:

- Block One:** Introduction to course; expectations
Introduction to spiritual teachings of
Of the world religions: Buddhism
- Block Two:** Introduction to spiritual teachings of
Hinduism and Islam
- Third Block:** Insights from the Spiritual traditions of Sufism and Taoism
- Fourth Block:** Experience of a variety of practices, meditations,
Breathing techniques, chanting.
Creating a spiritual practice that draws from several
Traditions
- Weekend Two**
- First Block:** Experience of a variety of practices, meditations,
Breathing techniques, body movements and chanting
- Block Two:** Reclaiming the feminine aspect in traditions
- Block Three:** Divergence/Convergence within traditions
- Block Four:** Continuation of practice; Judaism
- Block Five:** Practices continued and implications for ministry and
Social justice and compassion

Course Requirements:

1. Class participation and a keeping of some type of notes or journal of readings and reflections about each type of practices engaged in the course.
2. Completion of Reading assignments.
3. Reflection Paper # 1: Dialogue with another tradition by conversing with someone of another tradition. **Due the beginning of the Second Weekend. (3-5 pages).**
4. Reflection Paper #2 (3-5 pages)
Drawing on the insights, techniques, rituals and practices discussed and experienced in class, design a personal spiritual practice that integrates spiritual traditions. Due date to be decided by the course participants in dialogue with instructors.

Grade Distribution:

Class Participation: 60%

Written Assignments: 40%