REL 80: BUDDHISM: AN EXPERIENTIAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL INTRODUCTION
WINTER 2017
PRELIMINARY SYLLABUS

Course Overview
What is Buddhism? This course will provide an intellectual and experiential introduction to the philosophies and practices of Buddhism, both traditional and contemporary. We will focus particularly on mindfulness and compassion, unpacking these trainings in the context of life, work, and relationships. We will also spend time discussing the research on these practices. Participants will engage with traditional readings and practices including from the Pali Canon, as well as Mahayana Tibetan texts such as Shantideva’s Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life. As part of our exploration we will also read and discuss writings by such contemporary teachers as Thich Nhat Hanh, Pema Chodron, and the Dalai Lama.

Topics addressed include
What is the Buddhist worldview; how can we view or reconstrue the world and the human condition with Buddhist resources in hand? How might Buddhist practice and thought shape our understanding of contemporary social issues? How might Buddhist thought and practice shine light upon our lives, including our work, relationships, and spirituality? How can we understand the various goals of mindfulness? How can mindfulness enhance clarity in purpose and productivity? What is the connection between mindfulness and compassion? Is compassion in the practical world a strength or a weakness? What does compassionate action look like? Can mindfulness and compassion be trained at the individual level, can it be built into cultures and communities? How do mindfulness and compassion support recovery from setbacks?

Participants in the course will engage with exercises targeting the development of mindfulness and compassion.

Please Note
The course is designed to enter participants into dialogue with Buddhist texts and practices, not just to learn facts about Buddhism.

Discussion/Contribution
This course is an opportunity to delve into the theory and practice of mindfulness and compassion. For the course to be impactful, it is important that participants prepare before each session and spend time with the readings, meditations, reflection papers, and experiential investigations. The combination of the readings and experiential exercises lays the foundation for your learning experience not only for you as an individual, but also for the other participants.

Your contributions to class meetings include both active contributions (e.g. comments, questions, sharing your perspective) and supportive contributions (e.g. listening, full attention, and presence). To that end, the use of laptops, cell phones, and tablets, which detract from the quality of attention, will not be used in the classroom, and should be kept away during the
session. If you have a learning need that makes this problematic for you, please email the instructor to discuss an alternative plan within the first week of the quarter.

**GRADING OPTIONS:**

For this course, students have three grading options:

- No Grade Requested (NGR)
- Letter grade
- Credit/No Credit (CR/NC)

No Grade Requested (NGR) - No work is required for NGR students. No credit shall be received. Most students take Continuing Studies courses for No Grade Requested. This is also the default grading option.

Letter Grade - Written work is required in order to receive a letter grade. Students who are taking the course for a letter grade should meet with the instructor to discuss their 5-6 page paper. Final papers will follow the same format as the weekly writing assignments enumerated on the prior page.

A  Excellent ("plus" and "minus" may be used as modifiers with letter grades)
B  Good
C  Satisfactory
D  Minimal Pass
NP  Not Passed
I  Incomplete

Credit/No Credit (CR/NC) - In order to get "Credit," attendance and participation is required. The instructor determines the participation criteria for the credit awarded, based on the subject matter and format of the course.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Students may change their grading option up to the last day of class.
Readings and Lecture Topics by Week

OPTIONAL (PRIOR TO THE FIRST WEEK)

READING
Harris, Dan “Preface,” “The Power of Negative Thinking” and “Retreat” excerpts from 10% Happier: How I Tamed the Voice in My Head, Reduced Stress Without Losing My Edge, and Found Self-Help That Actually Works--A True Story Dey Street Books. 2014. Ch 6, 97-120, Ch 7, 121-150.

WEEK 1 (FEBRUARY 14)
Course introduction/ Early Buddhist Perspectives and Practices with a Focus on Mindfulness

READING


PRACTICE ASSIGNMENT
Mindfulness meditation- details to be shared in class

WEEK 2 (FEBRUARY 21)
Mindfulness in contemporary practice

READING

Chödrön, P. “Life without the Story Line” excerpt from Living Beautifully with Uncertainty and Change Shambhala. 2013 Ch2, pp 15-24


Kabat-Zinn, Jon “Stress” excerpt from Full Catastrophe Living Bantam. 2013. Ch 17, pp 287-296, Ch20, pp 335-349
PRACTICE ASSIGNMENT
Mindfulness meditation continued- details to be shared in class

WEEK 3 (FEBRUARY 28)
Early Mahayana Buddhism with a Focus on Compassion

READING

PRACTICE ASSIGNMENT
Compassion meditation- details to be shared in class

WEEK 4 (MARCH 7)

READING

Watch The Space Between Self-Esteem and Self Compassion: Kristin Neff tedx talk https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvtZBUSplr4

PRACTICE ASSIGNMENT
Compassion meditation- details to be shared in class

WEEK 5 (MARCH 14) Tibetan Thought and Practice—the Dalai Lama’s commentary

READING
Gilbert, P. “How to Turn Your Brain from Anger to Compassion” Greater Good Science Center, 2013


Smith, Emily “There’s No Such Thing as Everlasting Love (According to Science)” The Atlantic, January 2013

PRACTICE ASSIGNMENT
Compassion meditation- details to be shared in class
WEEK 6 (MARCH 21) SYNTHESIS; PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER!

READING

Kabat-Zinn, Jon “Keeping up the Informal Practice” excerpt from Full Catastrophe Living. Bantam. 2013. Ch.35, pp 586-591


PRACTICE ASSIGNMENT
Compassion meditation- details to be shared in class