

**COURSE SYLLABUS**  
**SPIRITUAL PRACTICES BEYOND RELIGIOUS BOUNDARIES**

Culture 673, Spring Semester, 2008, Thursday, 2:00-5:15 p.m.

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**Office:** Rm 209

**Hours:** Thursday: 9:00-10:00 a.m.

12:45-1:45 p.m.

5:15-6:15 p.m.

(I am always available by appointment  
or by telephone, including evenings and  
weekends)

“Religion in fact is not knowledge, but a faith and aspiration; it is justified indeed both by an imprecise intuitive knowledge of large spiritual truths and by the subjective experience of souls that have risen beyond the ordinary life, but in itself it only gives us the hope and faith by which we may be induced to aspire to the intimate possession of the hidden tracts and larger realities of the Spirit. That we turn always the few distinct truths and the symbols or the particular discipline of a religion into hard and fast dogmas, is a sign that as yet we are only infants in the spiritual knowledge and are yet far from the science of the Infinite.” Aurobindo [Ghose], 1872-1950 (from his *Synthesis of Yoga*, pp. 440-41)

- A. **PREREQUISITES:** NONE this semester
- B. **DESCRIPTION:** Students will be introduced to spiritual practices from a variety of sacred traditions through readings, videos, and experiences. These may include among others: meditation, prayer, ritual, scholarly study, reflective writing and reading, bodywork and body movement, chanting, dream interpretation, and guided visualization. Students will learn to begin to adapt and integrate a range of practices into their own spiritual life. The course will also investigate the metaphysical and anthropological presumptions underlying various spiritual traditions.
- C. **CLASS PROCEDURES:** Class time will consist of presentations by the professor, discussions, and implementation of spiritual practices (meditation, prayers, etc.). There will be ample time for discussion of assigned readings and videos. The professor expects students to engage in theological questioning and thinking. The format will be that of a graduate seminar, with extensive give-and-take between the professor and students. This will include a **Socratic form of dialogue**, in which the instructor directly engages individual students, and groups of students, by asking questions (often difficult ones) and posing problems. Reading materials prior to class (as well as viewing films) and the willingness to think on one’s feet are both important. Informed debate is part of the process. Disagreeing with one another and the professor is perfectly acceptable and encouraged, as long as we all maintain civility and mutual respect and engage in thoughtful discourse.

D. **COURSE GOALS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES:** At the end of the course, students will:

1. **Develop knowledge and understanding of several spiritual writers from a variety of sacred traditions through reading texts** (in so doing, the course will support students in learning to think theologically, help students prepare for spiritual leadership in a multi-faith world, and assist students in interpreting spirituality in a global fashion);
2. **Develop rudimentary knowledge and understanding of diverse spiritual practices through texts and videos and visits with practitioners** (in so doing, the course will support students in learning to think theologically, help students prepare for spiritual leadership in a multi-faith world, incorporate experience into the learning process, and assist students in interpreting spirituality in a global fashion);
3. **Begin to make spiritual discipline a part of their daily lives** (in so doing, the course will help students build a spiritual foundation that will help them to model meaning-making in their lives and to serve as more effective religious leaders);
4. **Learn to reflect regularly on spiritual beliefs and practices by keeping a reflective and thoughtful journal of the experience** [in so doing, the course will help students understand that spiritual experience is enhanced through regular, thoughtful reflection and realize that intellection and spirituality can fit seamlessly
5. **Start to integrate spiritual practice with theological thinking by writing a term paper that requires reflection on both experience and research** (in so doing, the course will help students integrate intellectual deliberation, body awareness, and spiritual exploration

E. **REQUIRED TEXTS AND READINGS:**

Pema Chödrön, *When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times*. Boston: Shambhala, 1997 [distributed by Random House]

Jiddu Krishnamurti, *Total Freedom: The Essential Krishnamurti* San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996

Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*. New York: New Directions, 1961 [Reprint: Boston: Shambhala, 2003]

Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Wisdom of Thich Nhat Hanh*. New York: One Spirit, 2000

Jane Roberts, *Seth Speaks: The Eternal Validity of the Soul*. New York: Prentice Hall, 1972

Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, *Jewish with Feeling: A Guide to Meaningful Jewish Practice*. With Joel Siegel. New York: Penguin, 2005

Howard Thurman, *Meditations of the Heart*. Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1981 [Reprint: Boston: Beacon Press, 1981]

Lucinda Vardey, *God in All Worlds: An Anthology of Contemporary Spiritual Writing*. New York: Random House, 1995

## REQUIRED FILMS

*Dreamkeeper*: Dir. Steve Baron, 2003 (DVD available at library); or (for students who have already seen *Dreamkeeper*) *Native Spirit and the Sun Dance Way*, as told by Thomas Yellowtail, narrated by Gordon Tootoosis and Tantoo Cardinal (DVD available at library soon)

Video on Sufis (tba): See also <http://www.ibiblio.org/cybersufis/>

## F. RECOMMENDATIONS AND FURTHER READING AND REFERENCE

\*NOT REQUIRED, but a potpourri of some interesting books on world spirituality in case students have the inclination to read further (of course there are many more)

Rudolfo Anaya, *Bless Me Ultima: A Novel*. Berkeley, CA: Quinto Sol Publications, 1972 [Reprint: New York: Warner Books, 1994]

Aurobindo [Ghose], *Synthesis of Yoga*. Fourth Edition. Twin Lakes, WI: Lotus Press, 2004 (1st ed. published in India in 1948)

Charlotte Joko Beck, *Everyday Zen*. Edited by Steve Smith. New York: HarperOne, 1989

Black Elk, *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Ogalala Sioux*. As told through John G. Niehardt. Illustrated by Standing Bear. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska, 1961 [Reprint 2004]

Dorothy Bryant, *The Kin of Ata Are Waiting for You*. New York: Moon Books, 1971 [Reprint: New York: Random House, 1997]

Jim Castelli (ed.), *How I Pray: People of Different Religions Share with Us that Most Sacred and Intimate Act of Faith*. New York: Ballantine, 1994

Edgar Cayce Readings (available on-line for a fee and on CD). For a biography, see Thomas Sugrue, *There is a River: The Story of Edgar Cayce*. 2nd ed. New York: Holt, 1959 (1st ed., 1942) [Reprint ARE Press, 2003]

David and Sabrineh Fideler (translated from the Persian by), *Love's Alchemy: Poems from the Sufi Tradition*. Novato, CA: New World Library, 2006

Rinpoche Sogyal, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*. Ed. by Patrick Gaffney and Andrew Harvey. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992

Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind: Informal Talks on Zen Meditation and Practice*. New York: Weatherhill, 1970 [Reprint: Boston: Shambhala, 2006]

James Welch, *Fool's Crow: A Novel*. New York: Viking, 1986

Dhyani Ywahoo, *Voices of Our Ancestors: Cherokee Teachings from the Wisdom Fire*. Boston: Shambhala, 1987

G. **ASSIGNMENTS AND ASSESSMENTS:**

1. **ATTENDANCE, CLASS PARTICIPATION AND EFFORT:** **Attendance and informed class participation** are required. **Informed class participation** refers primarily to two categories of contribution: a) the effort that students make in reading texts and seeing films, bringing the requisite materials to class, thinking about them before class, and communicating that knowledge in the classroom; b) participation in class discussion by asking good questions, making intelligent and insightful comments, offering thoughtful arguments and comments, providing useful information, and listening to others attentively and respectfully. Quality of oral communication, not quantity, determines the ultimate assessment. **This is worth 10% of the final grade.**

2. **ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY:** Students will do an annotated bibliography on the topic of their term paper. Students will develop and select bibliographic resources (in the Bosworth Memorial Library, the University of Kentucky, and on the World Wide Web) and offer brief summaries and analysis of the various texts under consideration. Students may meet with the following members of the library staff for advice: Tim Browning, Charlie Heaberlin, and/or Barbara Pfeifle. **This paper should be approximately five pages in length and is due March 13. Entries should be detailed enough for a relatively full description of each item (probably six to eight sentences in one paragraph).** Entries will include a summary of the contents, a description of the argument, as well as an analysis and evaluation of the argument as it pertains to the student's topic and the subject matter of the course. Evaluation of the bibliography will be based upon the quality of the entries, as well as the caliber and relevance of the references selected by the student. **This is worth 15% of the final grade.**

3. **SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE/PRACTICE AND JOURNAL:** Each student will select a spiritual discipline/practice and pursue it daily throughout the semester. These may include: prayer, meditation, spiritual journaling, dream diaries, body movement (e.g. dance, yoga, tai-chi, breathing, etc.), Bible reading and reflection, study of texts or poems, cooking as a spiritual art, writing poems, short stories, etc. What matters most is not the technique or modality, but rather how one approaches the particular discipline/practice. If seekers do this with a spiritual end in mind, then they are on embarking on the right track. Each student will complete a journal--with at least three entries per week of the semester (including break)--and hand it in by **May 1**. The journal should include observations, insights, reactions, questions, analysis, and ideas. When making entries, students should be both thoughtful and imaginative.

Following instructions and making a good-faith effort will lead to a grade of at least a "B" on this assignment. Exemplary quality will produce a higher grade (see below under "grades")

Students should only offer material that they consider comfortable sharing. There is no need to impart anything that students consider too private or personal. Before deciding on a discipline/practice, students should consider the nature of the discipline/practice and whether or not it would lend itself to the kinds of entries they feel comfortable making. Usually, in each of the disciplines/practices, journal writers can eliminate sensitive elements (which is acceptable) and focus on those that are appropriate for a classroom assignment such as this.

**The journal is worth 20% of the final grade.**

**4. ORAL PRESENTATION:** Students will do an oral presentation on their spiritual practice and research. The presentation will involve a discussion of their practice, an assessment of what they learned, the manner in which their practice intersects with their research, and an overview of the whole process. **This is worth 15% of the final grade and will take place the last few weeks of the semester.**

**5. TERM PAPER:** Students will write a term paper in which there are three components: i) Research on a particular spiritual thinker; ii) Observation, analysis, and synthesis of a limited number of texts of that thinker; iii) Integrating study of that writer with the student's own experience of the selected spiritual discipline/practice. **This is worth 40% of the final grade.**

H. **GRADES:** Grades follow the standard numerical breakdowns (93-100 = A; 90-92 = A-; 87-89 = B+; 83-86 = B; 80-82 = B-; 77-79 = C+; 73-76 = C; 70-72 = C-; 67-69 = D+; 63-66 = D; 60-62 = D-; 0-59 = F). "A/A-" means work of the highest quality and is a very difficult grade to achieve. A satisfactory grade is somewhere between a "B-" and a "C+." Anything "C" through "D-" means passable work, but of low quality. "F" indicates that the student did not meet the requirements of the course by not attending a sufficient number of classes, by not submitting passable work, and/or by failing to submit all work. Grades are based on work at a graduate level. The ability to write with clarity, correct grammar and syntax, correct spelling and punctuation, good communication skills, some style, and in an organized fashion, is essential. In written assignments, students must also demonstrate the capacity to think on their own and generate their own coherent and convincing arguments. Where appropriate, students must further display research skills such as the following: intelligent use of secondary literature, thoughtful sifting of data, and deft handling of footnotes. Grades will in part reflect student writing skills. Remember also: **GOOD WRITING IS AN EDITORIAL PROCESS** that almost always involves multiple drafts and rewrites.

Students should realize the importance of writing for their careers in ministry and in other religious professions. For example, writing an application for a position requires good writing skills. Ministers and others will have to write correspondence, sermons, newsletters, pastoral letters and essays, etc. Recipients will expect you to have the ability to communicate clearly, succinctly, imaginatively, and in an organized fashion.

If students are uncertain about their writing, the professor strongly encourages them to see Dr. Margie Ralph, the Director of the Writing Center, for assistance. The professor may also decide to recommend that certain students see Dr. Ralph, in which case the student is obligated to see Dr. Ralph.

Everyone should read and always have near their computer William Strunk and E. B. White, *The Elements of Style* (4th ed.). I also recommend that everyone read Deborah Core, *The Seminary Student Writes*. It will not only help students in this course, but in others at LTS as well.

For assistance with editing papers, students should consult someone with good writing skills. An on-line service that some institutions of higher education use is Smarthinking ([www.smarthinking.com](http://www.smarthinking.com)), available to individuals for a reasonable fee.

I. **ABSENCES:** Class attendance is essential. Unexcused absences will result in automatic lowering of the student's grade at the discretion of the instructor. Excused absences (which do not include circumstances over which one has personal control) are allowed, but three or more absences may lead to lowering of the grade at the discretion of the instructor. **Please do not telephone the instructor about an impending class absence or a prior class absence, but send an e-mail describing the situation.**

J. **OTHER POLICIES:**

- **Assignment Due Dates:** All assignments are due on the dates listed. Late assignments will receive a significant reduction in grade at the discretion of the professor.
- **Paper Format:** Turabian style or the University of Chicago *Manual of Style*, 15th ed., is preferred; most important is **consistency** of citation.
- **Cell Phones:** Cell phones should be turned OFF or put on silent mode during class (especially during a class on spirituality)
- **Inclusive Language:** Students should be aware of the Inclusive Language Policy of LTS and adhere to it in their class discussions and written materials.
- **Respect:** In classroom discussion, participants should show respect to one another by listening and paying attention before speaking.

- **Integrity:** For papers and exams, please adhere to the rules of honesty and integrity as outlined in the Student Handbook policies on cheating and plagiarism. Serious breaches of ethics may result in class failure and/or suspension or expulsion from the seminary. Needless to say, LTS expects students, as potential pastors and religious leaders, to adhere the highest ethical and moral standards.

K. **DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS:** Lexington Theological Seminary complies with the American with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. If you believe you have a condition which will require accommodation, please refer to the *Student Handbook* and follow the procedures outlined. Please review this syllabus carefully and make an appointment with the professor to discuss any assignment for which you believe you will need accommodation according to the arrangements made with the dean.

L. **CLASS SCHEDULE:**

\*The professor reserves the right to alter this schedule or assignment, if learning needs or time constraints require it

\*\*The professor intends to have some guest presenters (tba) and possible field trips (Gethsemane, Furnace Mountain)

February 7:

February 14:

Pema Chödrön, *When Things Fall Apart*

Lucinda Vardey, *God in All Worlds*, Chapters 9-10

February 21

Howard Thurman, *Meditations of the Heart*

Lucinda Vardey, *God in All Worlds*, Chapters 1-2

February 28

Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, *Jewish with Feeling*

Lucinda Vardey, *God in All Worlds*, Chapter 3

March 6

Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness* (pp. 1-98 in the *Wisdom of TNH*)

Thich Nhat Hanh, *Being Peace* (pp. 141-265 in the *Wisdom of TNH*)

Lucinda Vardey, *God in All Worlds*, Chapter 4

March 13

Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*

Lucinda Vardey, *God in All Worlds*, Chapter 5

**Annotated Bibliography Due**

March 20: **NO CLASS** (Spring Reading Week)

March 27

Jiddu Krishnamurti, *Total Freedom*, pp. 1-177  
Lucinda Vardey, *God in All Worlds*, Chapter 6

April 3

Jiddu Krishnamurti, *Total Freedom*, pp. 179-360  
Lucinda Vardey, *God in All Worlds*, Chapter 7

April 10

Jane Roberts, *Seth Speaks*, pp. 1-239  
Lucinda Vardey, *God in All Worlds*, Chapters 11-12

April 17

Jane Roberts, *Seth Speaks*, pp. 240-486  
Lucinda Vardey, *God in All Worlds*, Chapters 13-14

April 24

Lucinda Vardey, *God in All Worlds*, Chapter 15  
*Dreamkeeper* (DVD); or (if students have seen this) *Native Spirit and the Sun  
Dance Way* (DVD)

**Oral Presentations**

May 1

Lucinda Vardey, *God in All Worlds*, Chapters 16-17

**Journal Due**

**Oral Presentations**

May 8

Reading Week

May 13

**Term Paper Due**