

SIS 315 Contemplation and Political Change
Spring 2005
Professor Judith Shapiro

Regular office hours: Wednesdays after class and by appointment.

Email consultation encouraged any time!

Course Description Does socio-political change start with the self or society? What is the relationship between the landscape of internal experience and the political terrain of the external world? This course explores the connection between contemplative practice and socio-political engagement. It is structured around weekly yoga and meditation sessions; readings from political activists, philosophers, and survivors; guest lectures and field trips; and discussion of student experiences. Core topics include suffering and response, social “activism,” environmental protection, and the development of tools and techniques for the practice of mindfulness.

The first section of the course lays out the fundamental problem. The second section reflects on the relationship between the practice of mindfulness and socio-political action as exemplified in the work and lives of remarkable individuals. The third section explores the relationship between the self and the natural world in light of global and regional environmental degradation. The final section examines public engagement as a form of spiritually necessary practice.

Practical Matters Each session includes some practice of yoga, meditation, or other tool of internal exploration and mindfulness. Students should dress in loose, comfortable clothing (no jeans or belts), prepared to move freely. Classes will begin promptly at 11:20; it is essential that you arrive on time. Since we are using a space that also serves other purposes, it would be greatly appreciated if you could arrive early several times during the semester to help arrange chairs and clear the floor of debris.

The practice will be physically demanding at times and is not appropriate for students with chronic medical conditions or certain kinds of injuries. Please consult the instructor if you have any doubts about the suitability of this class for you.

Requirements Students are expected to attend all classes, participate actively, and do the readings. In addition, students are expected to develop their own daily “practice” — whether of meditation or yoga — lasting at least 15 minutes per day. Your experience with this practice, and reflections on the readings and course themes, is also required. The instructor will examine the journal in confidence once during the semester and again at the end — the journal should reflect your commitment to the course and will be taken into account in assigning final grades. Three short papers (4 to 7 pages) are also required. Finally, students are encouraged to engage in some sort of social activism (broadly defined) during the semester as a way of testing course themes through practice. Course grade rests 40% on attendance, in-class participation, journal consistency, and overall involvement with the class; 60% on papers.

Texts

The following required books are available for purchase at the bookstore:

Nien Cheng, *Life and Death in Shanghai*. New York: Grove, 1987.

Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*. (Rev.) New York: Washington Square Press, 1997.

Mahatma Gandhi, *Gandhi: An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1957.
Jack Kornfield, *A Path with Heart*. New York: Bantam, Doubleday, Dell, 1993.
Aung San Suu Kyi, *Letters from Burma*. New York: Penguin 1998.

Other readings will be distributed in class (so DON'T miss class!!) or made available on e-reserve and/or hard reserve.

PART ONE: THE PROBLEM

* January 12 Organizational meeting

PLEASE READ BEFORE FIRST CLASS: Arthur Koestler, "The Yogi and the Commissar," from *The Yogi and the Commissar and Other Essays*, pp. 3-14. Available electronically.

* January 19 The Commissar Nien Cheng, *Life and Death in Shanghai*, PART ONE, "The Wind of Revolution," pp. 3-125. David Chandler, "Explaining S-21," in *Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot's Secret Prison* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 143-156 (e-reserves).

George Orwell, *Animal Farm*. On line at: http://www.online_literature.com/orwell/animalfarm.

in-class video: selections from "The Killing Fields" (VHS 168).

* January 26 The Yogi

Thomas Merton, *Seven Storey Mountain* (1948), excerpts from Part Three, sections three and four (ereserves). Jack Kornfield, *A Path with Heart*, Chapters 1 - 3
Supplements about the practice of yoga: B.K.S. Iyengar, "Introduction" (selections) from *Light on Yoga* (New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2000), pp. 31-62 (e-reserves).

* February 2 Suffering and Meaning Viktor E. Frankl, "Experiences in a Concentration Camp," *Man's Search for Meaning*. Harold Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, Chapter One, pp 1-30 (e-reserves) FIRST JOURNAL SUBMISSION

* February 9 Suffering and Indifference

Garrett Hardin, "Living on a Lifeboat," *Bioscience* 24:10 (October 1974). Reprinted in Garrett Hardin and John Baden, eds., *Managing the Commons* (Indiana University Press, 1998), pp. 261-279 (e-reserves).

Kitty Genovese case (on-line research – find out what happened and how people explain it).

* February 16 Activism as Spiritual Necessity, Spirituality as Necessity for Activism

Archbishop Oscar Romero in *Spirituality Today*, web research on Liberation Theology.
<http://www.spiritualitytoday.org/spir2day/884022brockman.html> "Generosity, Codependence and Fearless Compassion," Chapter 15 in Kornfield, pp. 215-227. Roger Gottlieb, "Spirituality and Resistance: A Beginning," in *A Spirituality of Resistance: Finding a Peaceful Heart and Protecting the Earth* (Crossroad, 1999), pp. 9-32 (e-reserves).

FIRST PAPER DUE/ DISCUSSION OF FIRST PAPERS

* February 23 More Guidance from Spiritual Teachers Thich Nhat Hanh, Selections from *Our Appointment with Life* (distributed the week before class) Dalai Lama, “Ethics and Suffering,” from *Ethics for the New Millennium* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1999), pp.137-148 (e-reserves).

Martin Luther King, “Letter from the Birmingham Jail,” on line at:
http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/popular_requests/frequentdocs/birmingham.pdf
Supplement: “On the Relation of the Christian to the State: The Development of a Kingian Ethic / Lewis V. Baldwin.” In *the Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. : the Boundaries of Law, Politics, and Religion*, Lewis V. Baldwin with Rufus Burrow, Jr., Barbara A. Holmes, and Susan Holmes Winfield, eds. Notre Dame, Ind. : University of Notre Dame Press, 2002 (e-reserves).

PART TWO: INDIVIDUAL RESPONSES

* March 2 India Mahatma Gandhi, *Gandhi: An Autobiography The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (Selections) / SUPPLEMENT: Film, “Gandhi” in Library (non-print media center).

* March 9 SPRING BREAK NO CLASS

* March 16: Burma Aung San Suu Kyi, *Letters* (skim all). Aung San Suu Kyi, “Freedom from Fear,” in *Freedom from Fear and Other Writings* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1991), pp.180-185 (e-reserves).

* March 23 China Nien Cheng, *Life and Death in Shanghai* (remainder of book). In-class visit from Nien Cheng, if her health permits. SECOND JOURNAL SUBMISSION

PART THREE: INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL LANDSCAPES

* March 30 Environmental Degradation: Problems and Solutions Bill McKibben, *Hope, Human, and Wild* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995), “Curitiba,” pp. 59-115 (e-reserves). Web research: Harvard Forum on Religion and Ecology (<http://environment.harvard.edu/religion>) Selections from Stephanie Kaza and Kenneth Kraft, eds. *Dharma Rain: Sources of Buddhist Environmentalism* (Boston: Shambhala, 2000): “Environmental Activism as Buddhist Practice,” and “Home Practice, Wild Practice,” pp. 237-339 (e-reserves). SKIM.

* April 6 Nature as Meditation: Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, selections to be distributed week before class Class. hike to Billy Goat Trail. Wear good shoes, hands free, carry water! BE VERY PROMPT.

SECOND PAPER DUE

PART FOUR: SOLUTIONS

* April 13 Grassroots organizations Sample environmental webpages: greenpeace.org, earthfirst.org, nwf.org, wwf-us.org, hsus.org, peta.org, tnc.org, worldwatch.org, conservation.org, rff.org, wri.org, nrdc.org, sierraclub.org Sample human rights webpages: hrw.org, amnesty.org, hrichina.org, wola.org, ihrlg.org Study: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and The Earth Charter, selections from Ashoka materials.
Assignment: Please undertake some “new” (to you) form of socio-political engagement this week

and prepare to report to the class. Two-page write-up due in class.

* April 20 Socio-political Engagement as Practice
Discussion/reports on final topics.

FINAL exam date: May 4. Final papers due.