

SIS 396 and SIS 596 Contemplation and Political Change

Spring 2001 Mondays and Thursdays, 9:55-11:15

Centennial Hall Lounge

Professor Paul Wapner (SIS Annex) x1647 pwapner@american.edu

Professor Judith Shapiro (Asbury 228A) x1629 shapshap@erols.com

Course Description

Does 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 effective political action. It is structured around weekly yoga and meditation sessions, journal-writing, readings from great political activists and philosophers, guest lectures, and discussion of student activist experiences. Core topics include environmental protection, social justice, and the development of tools and techniques for the practice of mindfulness. Students will be invited to develop strategies for self-examination and to reflect on the relationship between internal experience and political change. The guiding theme of the course is that both internal and external approaches have a key role to play in addressing human well-being.

The first section of the course lays out the fundamental problem. The second section examines the relationship between the practice of mindfulness and political activism by focusing on the works and lives of individuals, including Mahatma Gandhi, the Dalai Lama, Nien Cheng and Terry Tempest Williams. The final section explores strategies for change through a substantive focus on environmental issues. The widespread degradation of the earth's soil, water, air and diversity of species represents an immense human challenge. Facing this challenge requires thinking carefully about routes toward social transformation.

Practical Matters

The Monday sessions of the course will be devoted to the practice of yoga, meditation, and other tools of internal exploration and mindfulness. Thursdays will be devoted to discussion of readings, guest lectures, and other activities. Students should come to Monday sessions dressed in loose, comfortable clothing (no jeans or belts), prepared to move freely. Classes will begin promptly at 9:55; students should arrive at the beginning of class ready for the practice. It is essential that you arrive on time.

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 and increasing during the semester. A journal will record your experience with this practice, as well as any reflections you may have on the relationships between the readings and the practice. The instructors will examine the journal (in confidence!) during the semester and again at the end. For those taking the course at the 300 level, three short papers of 4-6 pages are required. For those taking the course at the 500 level, additional readings, two short papers, and a final 15-page project are required. Finally, students are encouraged (but not required) to engage in some sort of social activism (broadly defined) during the course of the semester as a way of testing course themes through practice.

Short articles are available through electronic reserve. You can access these through the AU homepage by going to the “Library”, clicking on “Aladin”, then “Electronic Reserves”. The password for the course is: SHAPIRO396.

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

Nien Cheng, *Life and Death in Shanghai*. New York: Penguin Books, 1988.

Mahatma Gandhi, *Gandhi: An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1957.

Palden Gyatso, *Autobiography of a Tibetan Monk*. New York: Grove Press, 1997.

Stephanie Kaza and Kenneth Kraft, eds. *Dharma Rain: Sources of Buddhist Environmentalism*. Boston: Shambhala, 2000.

Erich Schiffman. *Yoga: The Spirit and Practice of Moving into Stillness*. New York: Pocket Books, 1996.

Terry Tempest Williams, *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place*. New York: Vintage Books, 1991.

Elie Wiesel, *Night*. New York: Bantam Books, 1982.

INTRODUCTION

Thursday, Jan 18 Organizational meeting

PART ONE: THE PROBLEM

January 22 and 25 The Fundamental Dichotomy

Arthur Koestler, “The Yogi and the Commissar” in *The Yogi and the Commissar and Other Essays*, pp. 3-14.

Roger Gottlieb, *A Spirituality of Resistance*, pp. 9-32.

Gary Nabhan, “Finding Ourselves in the Far Outside,” in *Cultures of Habitat: On Nature, Culture and Story*, 7-15.

Ram Dass and Paul Gorman, *How Can I Help?* pp 149-180.

SUPPLEMENTAL READING: Erich Schiffman, *Yoga*. Part Two, pp. 43-83.

January 29 and February 1 The Nature of Suffering

Harold Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, pp 1-29.

Frederick Douglas, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 205-221.

John Anderson and Molly Moore, "The Burden of Womanhood," in *Global Issues*, pp. 137-140.

Elie Wiesel, *Night* (entire)

SUPPLEMENTAL READING: Joseph Goldstein and Jack Kornfield, *Seeking the Heart*

of Wisdom: The Path of Insight Meditation, pp. 15-30, ix (Forward by The Dalai Lama)

February 12 and February 15 Responses to Suffering: Outrage and Indifference
FIRST JOURNAL SUBMISSION

Christopher Manes, *Green Rage: Radical Environmentalism and the Unmaking of Civilization*, pp 3-44.

Garrett Hardin, "Living on a Lifeboat," in Garrett Hardin and John Baden, *Managing the Commons*, pp. 261-279.

Richard Lamm, "The Heresy Trial of the Reverend Richard Lamm," 15 *Environmental Law*, 755 (1985).

February 19 and February 22 When Helping Doesn't Help

World Development Report, 1990, 1991, 1992. "Overview" (all three reports)

Bruce Rich, *Mortgaging the Earth*, Chapters 3 and 4, "Brave New World at Bretton Woods" and "The Faustian Paradox of Robert McNamara."

Jack Kornfield, "Generosity, Co-Dependency and Compassion," *A Path With Heart*

FIRST SHORT PAPER DUE

PART TWO: INDIVIDUAL RESPONSES

February 26 and March 1 India

Mahatma Gandhi, *Autobiography*. (300-level students: Selections TBA)

SUPPLEMENT: Film, "Gandhi" in Library (non-print media center), Tuesday, February 27, 7-10pm

March 5 and March 8 Tibet

Palden Gyatso, *Autobiography of a Tibetan Monk* (entire)

The Dalai Lama, "Make Tibet a Zone of Peace," in *Dharma Rain*, pp. 231-237.

WEEK OF MARCH 11-18: SPRING BREAK

March 19 and March 22 China

SECOND JOURNAL SUBMISSION

Nien Cheng, *Life and Death in Shanghai* (300-level students, focus on Part Two)

Guest lecturer: Nien Cheng

PART THREE: PERSON/PLANET

March 26 and March 29 Activism and Contemplation for the Rest of Us

No Reading/Discussion Groups

RECOMMENDED: Michael Lerner, *The Politics of Meaning*.

April 2 and April 5 Internal and External Landscapes I

Terry Tempest Williams, *Refuge* (entire)

April 9 and April 12 Internal and External Landscapes II
SECOND SHORT PAPER DUE

Dharma Rain: Part Five, “Home Practice, Wild Practice,” pp. 303-339.
CLASS HIKE

PART FOUR: ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM

April 16 and April 19 Activism and Social Change

Al Gedicks, “International Native Resistance to the New Resource Wars,” and Paul Wapner, “In Defense of Banner Hangers: The Dark Green Politics of Greenpeace,” in Bron Taylor, ed, *Ecological Resistance Movements*, pp 300-314.

Steve Lerner, *Eco-Pioneers: Practical Visionaries Solving Today’s Environmental Problems*, (selections)
Webpage: greenpeace.org
Webpage: earthfirst.org
Webpage: nwf.org

April 23 and April 26 Activism as Practice
FINAL SUBMISSION OF JOURNALS

Dharma Rain, Part Four, “Environmental Activism as Buddhist Practice,” pp. 237-293.
Heather Millar, “Generation Green?” *Sierra*, pp 36-47.

April 30 LAST CLASS: Wrap-up, reflections, discussion of final projects

FINAL PAPERS DUE