

Starr King School for the Ministry
Spiritual Practice for These Times:
Mindfulness, Gratitude & Sabbath Rest
Fall 2010

This is not a time to live without a practice. It is a time when all of us will need the most faithful, self-generated enthusiasm (enthusiasm: to be filled with god) in order to survive in human fashion. Whether we reach this inner state of recognized divinity through prayer, meditation, dancing, swimming, walking, feeding the hungry or enriching the impoverished is immaterial. We will be doubly bereft without some kind of practice that connects us, in a caring way, to what begins to feel like a dissolving world. -- Alice Walker, We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For (2006)

Course Description: In this year-long, on-line course, students will expand and deepen their understanding and practice of six ancient, intersecting spiritual practices: mindfulness, gratitude and sabbath rest (fall semester); compassion, kindness, and joy (spring semester). The class will be experiential and inter-spiritual, drawing on the wisdom and practices of Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Buddhism, as well as positive psychology, neuroscience, poetry and deep ecology.

Course Objectives: During Fall semester, students will: (1) sample various practices, formal and informal, involving mindfulness, gratitude and sabbath rest; (2) develop and/or deepen a sustainable personal spiritual practice; (3) work together to create a caring and collaborative learning community; (4) compare and contrast teachings and practices on mindfulness, gratitude and/or sabbath rest from three different spiritual traditions and/or world views; and (5) cite and discuss at least three examples of how mindfulness, gratitude and sabbath rest can promote health and well-being, counter oppressions and build just and sustainable communities.

By the end of the semester, it is expected that most students will: (1) be doing a sitting and/or walking mindfulness meditation 20-30 minutes/day at least 5 days a week; (b) have developed an informal mindfulness practice on some aspect of everyday life (e.g., eating, movement, spending, parenting, etc.); (3) note three things for which they are grateful each day at least 5 days a week; and (4) set aside 12-24 hours a week for sabbath rest.

Course Texts: All students will be asked to read and use *A Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Workbook (with CD)* by Boh Stahl and Elisha Goldstein, 2010, (ISBN 13-978-1572247086), \$24.96. An exception may be made in cases where students have completed a mindfulness based stress reduction group.

In addition, students will be expected to read or listen to at least three books or CDs from the class Resource Lists. As an alternative, students may attend an event or film related to their spiritual practice instead of reading a book or listening to a CD.

Course Requirements: The main expectation - and hope - of this course is that students develop and/or deepen their spiritual practice and support others in doing the same. This will be accomplished by each student participating weekly in the following on-line forums in Moodle: (1) Practice Circle; (2) Writing Exercise; and (3) Readings & Conversation.

In addition, students are encouraged (4) to share joys and sorrows, questions and concerns, as needed, in the Community forum and (5) post at least three short reviews of books, cd's, films or events in the Recommendations & Reviews forum by the end of the semester.

Finally, students will be expected to (6) complete a self-evaluation based on course objectives towards the end of the class and (7) share something they've learned in the class with their family, congregation, community or world. The latter can take many forms, including: doing writing exercises with a partner, facilitating a small group session on mindfulness, organizing a slow food feast, preaching, teaching a mindfulness meditation exercise to young children, organizing a boycott of ecologically harmful product(s), or taking family and/or friends on a nature hike.

Course Instructor: This on-line course will be taught by Christine Fry, an ordained Unitarian Universalist minister and SKSM ('96) graduate. While Chris has taught a variety of classes (e.g., Forgiveness; Poetry, Illness & Pastoral Care; Health & Healing; Religious Education; and Compassion & Moral Repair) for several years at Starr King, this will be her first on-line course. Chris' ministry these days includes teaching, facilitating "Write for Health" groups, and offering spiritual direction. She lives in Davis, California with her daughter Esumi (a high school senior) and her husband, Isao Fujimoto, a professor at UC Davis and community activist.

Office Hours: Chris will be available to meet with students individually through email (revcfry@aol.com), by phone and, possibly on occasion, in person. Students are asked to contact Chris through email to make arrangements for phone or in-person meetings.

Calendar:

September 7-12 : Becoming Mindful

September 13-19 : Mindfulness Meditation

September 20-26 : Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction

September 27-October 3 : Mindfulness of the Body

October 4-10 : Slowing Down

October 11-17 : Cultivating Mindfulness in Everyday Life

October 18-24 : Noticing Our Thoughts & Emotions

October 25-31: Reading Week

November 1-7 : Habits & the Costs of Mindlessness

November 8-14 : Interpersonal Mindfulness

November 15-21 : Mindfulness, Money & Work

November 22-28 : Giving Thanks

November 29-December 5 : Gratitude in Trying Times

December 6-12 : Living Sabbath

December 13-19 : Sustaining Our Practice

Bibliography

Books

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Alexander, Scott. *Everyday Spiritual Practice: Simple Pathways for Enriching Your Life* (Skinner House, 1999). ISBN-1558963757. \$16.00.

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0547085737. \$13.95.

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