

Starr King School for the Ministry ~ Online Course (3 units) ~ Fall Semester 2015

RSSP-8410.FA15 Mysticism and Social Change

Instructor: Rev. Liza J. Rankow, MHS, PhD

Course Description:

This course will explore the powerful synergy between mystic spirituality and social activism. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote, “Only through an inner spiritual transformation do we gain the strength to fight vigorously the evils of the world in a humble and loving spirit.” In the urgent and troubling context of current world events, we will look to the example of “mystic-activists” from diverse cultures and faith traditions for insight and inspiration. Readings and multimedia materials will include Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, and Indigenous sources.

The model of “mystic-activism” refers those individuals (whether self-identified as mystics or not) whose recognition of the unity of all life, and whose love for the Divine in all creation, compelled and sustained their work of peace and justice-making. Online class discussions will identify key principles, consider areas of common ground and uniqueness among those studied, and students will be encouraged to incorporate any practices and perspectives that may enrich their own lifework. The ethical implications of the mystic experience and worldview will be a focus throughout.

All of us who work and serve and struggle in the world require a regular discipline of, as Howard Thurman put it, “watering our roots” to replenish the inner spirit. Through a wholistic approach of both heart and head, we will engage specific practices to nourish and sustain an ongoing commitment to anti-oppression work and ministerial service.

Class Format & Technical Requirements:

Our virtual classroom will employ an array of resource modalities – readings, images, video, audio, and web links for further exploration. Students are encouraged to contribute to the evolution of our shared space as we journey together. There will not be formal lectures, but rather discussion, reflection, and elaboration in the classroom forums as we explore and unpack each week’s materials. Everyone is expected to actively participate via substantive original posts and interactive comments on the posts of other students and the instructor. Please see p.6-7 of this syllabus for additional guidance.

If schedules and technical logistics permit, we will coordinate one or two real-time class meetings with local folks in person and other classmates via skype (etc), days/times to be arranged by group consensus.

In addition, each week (after the first three) a different pair of students will collaborate to provide a brief “devotional” for the group – a meditation, prayer, or spiritual practice to open that week’s convening. Sign-up for this is found in the introductory section of our Moodle page (required).

Successful participation in this course will require high-speed internet access (capable of watching online video) and sufficient technological literacy to navigate Moodle and ancillary technologies (such as VoiceThread, skype, google hangout, etc). Please make use of online tutorials and technical assistance available through SKSM and GTU prior to the start of class so you are ready to engage fully! If you have technical difficulties, please get help immediately so you do not fall behind. Your computer should support video-conferencing via skype or similar technologies.

Instructor Contact Information:

The best way to reach me is by e-mail to: rankow@onelifeinstitute.org. Please put “SKSM Class” as the subject line so I will be able to recognize it as coming from you. You may also leave a voice message on the OneLife Institute voice mail line (510.595.5598); I am the only one who receives those messages. From there we can arrange to meet by phone or skype on an individual basis, as needed. (For instructor bio visit: www.onelifeinstitute.org/meetourteam.html)

ECO / Thresholds:

This course supports the SKSM emphasis on educating to counter oppressions (ECO) by presenting a compassionate, empowered, and embodied approach to individual and social transformation. Course content intentionally de-centers whiteness, drawing on wide range of cultures and faiths. It encompasses several Threshold Areas, most notably those involving an interfaith and intercultural commitment, prophetic witness and work, and spiritual practice and care of the soul. Its concept and format provide for the integration of theory and application, inner communion and outward action, intellect and creativity.

Learning Outcomes:

Through full and committed participation students will be able to:

- Identify the foundations of engaged spirituality as it is found in diverse traditions
- Explain the ethical implications of a mystic (or unitive) worldview
- Describe the reciprocal synergies between personal and social transformation
- Discuss examples of individuals whose spirituality deeply informs their work for peace and justice
- Give examples of practices to support sustainable activism / service
- Examine the relevance and applications of course learnings to their own commitments & lifework

Course Expectations:

- Commit a minimum of 12 hours per week for a 3 credit hour graduate course (including readings and other resource materials, forum participation, and additional course activities).
- Approximately 40-70 pages of reading per week, plus video, audio, and web resources. As in a traditional classroom setting, readings should be completed *prior* to the “meeting” date listed (Monday of each week), and the week itself used for posting and interaction.
- On Monday of each week make primary forum post (equivalent to a 1-2 page thought paper, roughly 450- 900 words). Make substantive comments on other’s posts during the week according to rubric.
- Praxis Project – the charge is to embody the principles studied in your own life through integrating your spiritual practice with the work of justice-making and social transformation in whatever form that uniquely takes for you. Students will make regular blog posts (in Moodle) to reflect on their process, and make a final class presentation. Please consult the separate sheet on Praxis Projects for details (this is found in the ESSENTIALS folder on our Moodle page).
- Final 5-7 page paper synthesizing your key learning’s for the class. Additional information is below, under Week 15 of the syllabus. Specific guidance will be provided on our Moodle page.

Course Evaluation:

Assessment will be based on the quality and depth of your engagement with the material and learning community, as evidenced by class participation and contributions, preparation, forum posts, final project and final paper. Please let me know within the first two weeks if you will need a letter grade for your particular program of study, otherwise the course will be conducted on a pass/fail basis, with narrative evaluations as required for SKSM students.

Course Materials:

All course materials will be available on or linked via GTU Moodle. This will include PDF format readings, web-based, and multimedia resources. Students will be required to indicate their agreement to respect Copyright laws in accessing and using these materials. Please complete the copyright agreement found in the introductory materials on our Moodle page (above Week One) as one of your first orders of business for the course. Thank you.

Course Outline:

This course outline is a living document. It provides a rough map of the terrain we will cover together. I have included a list of authors for each week's study, but may add to or amend resources as we go, if I think it will enhance your learning experience. Ultimately, the Moodle page itself will become our final syllabus by the time our semester is complete. *Each week, please be sure to read my Introduction to the Readings for that week (posted in Moodle) as your first order of business.*

• UNIT ONE: INTRODUCTIONS AND DEFINITIONS

Week 1 / Sept 8

Introduction to the course and one another. Defining key concepts. Logistics. Please review all the items in the introductory space of our Moodle page (below the SKSM course title bar, above Week One).

Readings: Evelyn Underhill, William James, Dorothee Soelle, Janet Ruffing, and brief mystic narratives

Introductions: Please post your self-introductions on or before the first day of class. These will be in two formats, both found in the introductory space of the Moodle page:

(1) A short **personal essay** posted to the forum: Please introduce yourself and share something about your life journey and spiritual walk. Also include your reasons for taking this course, what you bring to it, what you hope to receive, and what might get in the way...

(2) A **short video** posted in response to the VoiceThread, sharing: Your full name and preferred name; Where you grew up and where you live now; Where your grandparents are from; What school/ program you are in and where you are in that process (what year, etc); and finally, in acknowledgement of Howard Thurman's quote (below), "What makes you come alive?"

"Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive and go do that, because what the world needs is people who have come alive." ~ Howard Thurman

Technical Note: VoiceThread (www.voicethread.com) is a learning technology which allows for audio and video comments to a central post. You will find detailed instructions on the Moodle page for the VoiceThread introductions. Be brave. This “assignment” is not for evaluation, but in hopes of allowing us to connect with one another more fully, despite the limitations of an online course!

• UNIT TWO: INTERFAITH PARADIGMS OF ENGAGED SPIRITUALITY

Week 2 / Sept 14 ~ Indigenous Traditions & Judaism

- Indigenous – Worldview of oneness, all is part of the sacred (no “secular” division)

Readings: Jeannette Armstrong, Oren Lyons, 13 Grandmothers , Coumba Toure, Carol Jacobs

- Judaism – Tikkun olam & tikkun ha’nefesh, Tzaddikum

Readings: Estelle Frankel, Abraham Joshua Heschel (plus Ellsberg on Heschel), Tzaddikim

Videos: Heschel interview; Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers / Audio: Estelle Frankel

Week 3 / Sept 21 ~ Christianity

- Christianity – Peacemakers

Readings: Neil Douglas-Klotz, Henri Nowen, Vincent Harding, Dom Helder Camara, Jean Zaru (2)

Video: Barrio de Paz (about Nelsa Curbelo)

Week 4 / Sept 28 ~ Islam & Buddhism

- Islam – Peacemakers

Readings: Ibtisam Mahmeed, M.R. Bawa Muhaiyaddeen; Gwendolyn Zoharah Simmons

- Buddhism – Bodhisattvas

Readings: Diana Winston, Joanna Macy, Sulak Sivaraksa; Bodhisattva vow

Video: Unit Two Summary

• UNIT THREE: MYSTICISM AND ETHICS

Week 5 / Oct 5 ~ Mysticism & Ethics

Readings: Liza Rankow, Howard Thurman (plus Harding on Thurman & MLK), Mohandas Gandhi

Video: Conversations with Howard Thurman

Week 6 / Oct 13 ~ Mysticism & Ethics

Readings: Beverly Lanzetta, Barbara Holmes, John Mohawk

Short videos: Nirmala Deshpande, Juila Esquivel, Rangimarie Turuki Rose Pere, Aung San Suu Kyi

Week 7 / Oct 19 ~ Mysticism & Ethics

Readings: Rabia Teri Harris, Valdina Pinto, Thich Nhat Hanh, Arkan Lushwala

Short video: Ubuntu

Note: Check in re praxis projects; mid-term course evaluations

Week 8 / Oct 26 ~ GTU READING WEEK ~ no class

• UNIT FOUR: PERSONAL & SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Week 9 / Nov 2 ~ Transformative Change

Readings: US Social Forum Statement on Transformative Change, Vimala Thakar, SGI Poison Into Medicine, Martin Luther King Jr

Audio: angel Kyodo williams interview

Week 10 / Nov 9 ~ Personal & Social Transformation

Readings: Rangimarie Turuki Rose Pere, Alice Walker, Aung San Suu Kyi, Claudia Horwitz

Short video: Tonglen meditation

• UNIT FIVE: LIVING THE VISION

Week 11 / Nov 16 ~ Living the Vision

Readings: Desmond Tutu, Dolores Huerta, Zalman Schacter-Shalomi, Rachel Naomi Remen, Ruby Sales, Alicia Garza, Zenju Earthlyn Manual

Short videos: Reb Zalman / Audio: Desmond Tutu, Liza Rankow, Janelle Monae

Week 12 / Nov 23 ~ Living the Vision

Readings: Donald Rothberg, Howard Thurman, Starhawk, Clarissa Pinkola Estes; Claudia Horwitz & Jesse Vega-Frey; Burnout resources

Videos: A Warrior Prays (spoken word piece); Idle No More

Week 13 / Nov 30 ~ Final Project Presentations

Final Project presentations – ideally during a real-time video-conference class session (date TBD)

Week 14 / Dec 7 ~ Life Visioning / Class Closing

Michael Beckwith & Life Visioning exercise

Course summary questions; final course evaluations

Short video: Wangari Maathai

Week 15 / Dec 14 ~ Final papers due by Saturday, Dec. 19, 2015

- **Please upload your paper as a Word document via Moodle**

Your final paper for the class will be a contextual essay tying together all that we have studied this semester. While it should make reference to your experience with the praxis project, as a personal lens that (hopefully) related to the course materials, please focus on the readings (and other core materials) and key concepts we have discussed in the class.

Although relatively brief, it is a formal academic paper. It should be scholarly, including appropriate reference citations, footnotes, etc. Most of your references will be to our course materials, but you are welcome to bring in additional sources if/as needed to substantiate your point(s). These should be in addition to, not instead of, reliance on course materials.

Here is a helpful link which provides guidance on proper citation format (Chicago style) for all types of traditional and new media sources: <http://library.williams.edu/citing/styles/chicago1.php>

Your paper should be 5 - 7 pages (without citations, meaning they are *additional* to the 5-7 pages), using the equivalence of 12 point Times, double spaced, 1 inch margins. Your papers will be due at the end of Week 15, the week following our last online class session. Please submit them as uploaded Word document files via Moodle by Saturday, December 19th.

I will provide additional guidance via Moodle as needed, and am glad to consult with you individually as you consider the direction of your paper.

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- **WEEKLY FORUM POSTS** •

Your primary weekly posts should be considered as short thought papers (1-2 pages, which is roughly 450 - 900 words), reflecting on the readings and other materials for that week. They should go up on Monday so the rest of the week can be used for discussion (ie, your comments and engagement with one another's posts). Week One is the exception, in terms of timing.

These posts are less formal than an academic paper. For example, you don't necessarily need to have a tidy conclusion. Sharing what you are wrestling with or what questions the readings opened up for you is great, but it should be fully articulated. More than "I liked it" or "I agree/disagree." And more than simply restating what was said --- What did you learn new? What was challenged or reaffirmed? What touched you? Why? What "dots" were connected (aha's)? What questions did it raise? What insights? What relevance does it have for your life? For social engagement and spiritual formation? For ministry? For the complex issues we face in the world today? Perhaps there is even a question/thought you'd like your colleagues in the class to weigh in on?

I am looking for evidence that you read (or watched/listened) and understood the material. AND for evidence that you are synthesizing and applying ideas, and employing critical thinking. (A quick check of Wikipedia provides this definition of critical thinking: "The list of core critical thinking skills includes observation, interpretation, analysis, inference, evaluation, explanation, and meta-cognition.") The rubric on the next page provides additional guidance.

During the week, please read everyone's primary posts and offer substantive comments on at least two. Also, please read any comments that I make, since I will often offer teaching points and additional resources in response to things you post or questions you ask. Generally I will wait to make my comments until toward the end of the week to give you time to engage one another.

Rubric for Discussion Forums • Mysticism & Social Change • Dr. Liza Rankow

Discussion Forum participation provides an opportunity for members of the class to learn from each other based on the readings, different life experiences, and unique perspectives gained from studying course materials. It also assists adult learners in learning how to effectively convey ideas to a group in a professional and respectful manner. Please use this rubric as a guide.

Criteria	Excellent	Good	Not Yet There	Not There At All
Timeliness of original substantive post	Makes original post on the Monday of each week	Makes original post on Tuesday	Makes original post Wednesday or later	Does not make original post each week
Meaningful responses to posts by other students and the instructor	Substantive responses at least 3 times each week to posts by other students and/or instructor	Less frequent or less substantive interaction	Infrequent or insubstantial interaction	No substantive interaction with other's posts
Timely discussion contributions	Interactive postings well distributed throughout the week	Postings somewhat distributed throughout the week	Postings not distributed throughout the week	Does not interact
Demonstration of knowledge and understanding gained from readings	Very clear that readings and other materials were understood and incorporated well into posts	Readings were understood and incorporated into posts	Postings have questionable relationship to reading material	Not evident that readings were understood & incorporated into discussion
Clarity	Posts are well articulated, clear, and easy to follow	Posts are clear and understandable	Posts are understandable, but some effort is required to follow	Posts are unclear or difficult to follow
Development of Ideas	Well-developed ideas; introduces new ideas, and stimulates discussion	Developing ideas; sometimes stimulates discussion	Poorly developed ideas which do not add to the discussion	Posts are confusing or do not relate to the subject at hand
Evidence of critical thinking and insight	Clear evidence of critical thinking – application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Posts demonstrate depth of insight, originality, and relevance. Points made are clear and well-supported.	Posts generally accurate, but could be improved with more analysis and creative thought. Tend to recite facts rather than explore issues.	Posts are peripheral to the subject and/or do not demonstrate insight, critical thinking or creative thought	Does not enter the discussion