

Mysticism and Social Change (1.5 credit hours) – Draft Syllabus

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

Starr King School for the Ministry • August 22-26, 2016 • 1-5 PM daily

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 class explorations 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 life, and whose love for the Divine in all creation, compelled and sustained their work of peace and justice-making. Class discussions will 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 consider specific practices to nourish and sustain an ongoing commitment to justice work and ministerial service.

Class Format:

A highly interactive lecture-discussion format will be enriched by audio and video recordings of several “mystic-activists,” inspirational music, spiritual practices, and resources to support the ongoing application of the principles covered during our time together. Because the course is being offered in an intensive format, advance reading and viewing several online videos will be required preparation.

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 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.

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

Student Expectations:

- Attendance and active participation in class discussion and activities
- Completion of advance reading and video assignments in preparation for our time together
- Keep a “reader’s journal” of ideas, insights, questions, revelations, disagreements, aha’s, resonances, applications, quotes, etc to fuel and focus class discussions and final paper.
- A short personal statement posted in Moodle (due one week prior to our first meeting). 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... Please be sure to read everybody’s posts before we meet.
- Final 8-10 page paper reflecting on some aspect of the course materials, due ten days after the final meeting date. Please submit via Moodle as a Word document. [8-10 pages (plus footnotes), double spaced, 1” margins, equivalent of Times 12 pt font]

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, and final paper. Please let me know 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 in Moodle) as one of your first orders of business for the course. Thank you.

** Note: Please make sure you have current Moodle log-in credentials from your school far in advance, so you have time to read / watch the course materials prior to our first class meeting.*

Preliminary Course Outline (*readings/resources are subject to revision*)

Aug 22: Introductions. What is Mysticism? Mystic-Activism? Defining our terms.

Mon. Readings: James, Underhill, Ruffing, Soelle

Aug 23: Interfaith Paradigms of Engaged Spirituality

Tues. Readings: Winston, Macy, Frankel, Ellsberg, Douglas-Klotz, Zaru, Muhaiyaddeen, Nouwen, Armstrong, Lyons, Harding

Aug 24: Mysticism and Ethics

Weds. Readings: Lanzetta, Thurman, Nhat Hanh, Holmes, Pinto, Harris

Aug 25: Personal and Social Transformation

Thurs. Readings: Thakar, King, Suu Kyi, Horwitz, Walker, Pere, US Social Forum Stmt, SGI

Aug 26: Living the Vision

Fri. Readings: Tutu, Schachter-Shalomi, Rothberg, Thurman, Starhawk, Estes, Remen, Garza

Video resources will include: Howard Thurman, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Nelsa Curbelo, Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers, Idle No More, Janelle Monae, and others.