

[Note: This course is only open to students who completed the fall semester of Spiritual Practice for These Times.]

Starr King School for the Ministry
Spiritual Practice for These Times:
Compassion, Kindness & Joy
Spring 2011 Syllabus

Kindness is compassion in action. It is a way of taking the vital human emotions of empathy or sympathy and channeling those emotions into a real-life confrontation with ruthlessness, abandonment, thoughtlessness, loneliness - all the myriad ways, every single day, we find ourselves suffering or witnessing suffering in others. . . .When we really examine kindness we find it is a deep and abiding understanding of how connected we all are. -- Sharon Salzberg, The Force of Kindness

Course Description: : “Now is the time to open wide our hearts,” says Alice Walker. The world, our planet, our very lives depend on it. Yet many of us become overwhelmed, angry, or indifferent in the face of so much suffering. This will be a class in which students expand and deepen their practice of compassion, kindness and joy. This will be both a personal and communal journey. 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. It will build on the spiritual practices students developed during the fall, namely: mindfulness, gratitude, and Sabbath rest.

Educating to Counter Oppression & Create Just, Sustainable Communities:
This course is designed to support and extend Starr King School’s commitment to educate to counter oppression and create just, sustainable communities. As students will come to understand, compassion is more than an emotion. It is an on-going, spiritual discipline that allows us to see and listen to “the other,” to all who are suffering (including the earth). Compassion asks us to drop the pretense that we are separate, and the illusion that we are, everywhere, the same. It provides us with opportunities to act with kindness, to rid ourselves of our addictive ways, and to enter into genuine, caring, just relationships as we work together to “repair the world.”

The concept of “repair” reminds us that we must start where we are, with the resources we have at hand, no matter how much we long for a world that is not this one. Margaret Walker describes “moral repair” as “the task of restoring or stabilizing - and in some cases creating - the basic elements that sustain human beings in a recognizably moral relationship.” She acknowledges that in the face of serious wrong-doing, the task of repair is often complicated, time-consuming and demanding. Ultimately, it may be unsuccessful. As we all know from our

everyday lives, not everything that is broken can be repaired. Moreover, that which is repaired, is never quite the same. On the other hand, our efforts to “repair the world” can - and do - bring us together in ways which restore trust and hope; bring joy, love and beauty into our lives; and give us a renewed sense of purpose, strength and energy.

As religious leaders, we are expected to be compassionate, kind and hopeful people but are rarely given the opportunity or skills to do so in an on-going sustainable way. As a result, we often suffer from “compassion fatigue,” act out in unhealthy and/or addictive ways, and do damage to ourselves, our spiritual communities and others.

This course is designed to do the opposite: to support seminary students in developing joyful, just and sustainable spiritual practices to guide them in their ministries, work, activism and personal lives.

Course Objectives: During Spring semester, students will: (1) sample various practices, formal and informal, involving compassion, kindness and joy; (2) add tonglen and loving kindness meditation to their on-going mindfulness meditation practice; (3) continue to develop a sustainable personal spiritual practice of their own choosing; and (4) work together to create a caring and collaborative learning community.

Course Texts: All students will be asked to use Pema Chodron’s CD called “Good Medicine: How to Turn Pain into Compassion with Tonglen Meditation” (ISBN-10: 1564558460, \$16.47). They will also use the CD from the MBSR Workbook by Bob Stahl and Elisha Goldstein purchased in the fall for loving kindness meditation (ISBN: 9781572247086; \$24.95). Short course readings will be posted weekly on Moodle.

Course Requirements: The main expectation - and hope - of this course is that students deepen their spiritual practice and support others in doing the same. To accomplish this goal, students will be asked weekly to: (1) experiment with various practices related to compassion, kindness and joy; (2) do the assigned listening and reading; (3) post reflections on their practice and reading on Moodle and/or the class FaceBook page; and (4) comment on and support at least one other student’s work.

Course Instructor: This on-line course will be taught by Christine Fry, an ordained Unitarian Universalist minister and SKSM ('96) graduate. Chris has taught a variety of classes (e.g., Forgiveness; Poetry, Illness & Pastoral Care; Health & Healing; Religious Education; and Compassion & Moral Repair) at Starr King. In addition to teaching, Chris’ ministry includes Write for Health groups and 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.

She is an active member of the United Methodist Church and interfaith community in Davis.

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

Calendar:

January 31-February 6

Week One: Starting Where We Are

February 7-13

Week Two: Listening to the Cries of the World

February 14-20

Week Three: Tonglen

February 21-27

Week Four: Obstacles to Compassion

February 28 – March 6

Week Five: Developing Self-Compassion

March 7-13

Week Six: Spiritual Masters in Contemplative Compassion

March 14-20

Week Seven: Preventing Compassion Fatigue

March 21-27

Reading Week

March 28-April 3

Week Eight: Metta: Loving Kindness Meditation

April 4-10

Week Nine: Uncovering Stories of Compassion & Kindness

April 11-17

Week Ten: Kindness, Leadership & Courage

April 18 – April 24

Week Eleven: Inclining the Mind Toward Joy

April 25 – May 1

Week Twelve: Grateful Hearts, Joyful Hearts

May 2-8

Week Thirteen: Dancing in the Good Times & Hard

May 9-15

Week Fourteen: Opening Wide: Hearts, Minds & Hands

May 16- 20

Week Fifteen: Celebrating What We've Learned Together