

# Spiritual Practice for These Times

Spring 2014

## Preliminary Syllabus



*Joy does not simply  
happen to us. We have  
to choose joy and keep  
choosing it every day.*

*-- Henri Nouwen*

*Please Note: This class is open only to students who completed the Fall 2013 class in Spiritual Practice for These Times.*

**Course Description:** In this year-long, on-line course, students will explore, develop and deepen their spiritual practice and encourage others to do the same. The class will be experiential and multi-faith, drawing on some of the wisdom and practices of Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Buddhism, as well as positive psychology, neuroscience, poetry and deep ecology. Fall semester focused on practices for becoming mindful, keeping a sabbath, and cultivating gratitude. Spring semester will continue along similar lines, focusing on practices which deepen compassion, loving-kindness and joy.

**Course Objectives:** By the end of Spring semester, it is expected that students will have: (1) continued and deepened some form of personal spiritual practice; (2) contributed to a caring and collaborative learning community; (3) sampled a variety of spiritual practice exercises; and (4) be able to cite and discuss how practices such as compassion, loving kindness and joy promote health and well-being, counter oppressions, and help build joyful, just and sustainable communities and ministries.

**Course Texts:** There will be no required course text(s). Each week there will be a selection of short readings and, occasionally, a video clip. Some books and films related to the week's theme will also be suggested.

**Attendance.** It is the student's responsibility to show up for class each week. The only way it will be clear that a student is present, is if they post their work and interact with others. This means shy students may need a nudge to "speak up" and verbose students may need to hear "let's have someone else speak" just as would be the case in a non-virtual classroom.

Given the nature of the course, it is helpful if the student reviews the week's theme and assignments at the beginning of the week, completes those assignments during the week, and reads and comments on some of their classmates' posts by the end of the week. Many of the spiritual practice exercises will require doing something at least 2-3 days during the week, albeit for short periods of time. So this is not the kind of a course where a student can devote a Saturday or Sunday to the class and be done. On the other hand, each student is encouraged to find a rhythm that works well for them.

The class format is asynchronous meaning that we do not all show up on-line at the same time (which would be difficult given our different schedules and time zones).

If a student needs to miss a week of class, they are asked to inform their instructor and classmates, preferably in advance. There are 15 weekly sessions plus a Reading Week. **Students must complete the work for at least 12 of these weekly sessions including the final session.** If a student is having difficulty showing up to class and completing their work in a timely way, it is their responsibility to contact the professor and make alternate arrangements.

**Weekly Assignments:** Each week students will be expected to complete the assignments below as they relate to the week's theme. This will involve a minimum of 5 short posts. Students will:

- (1) Review the texts for the week (readings and some video clips);
- (2) Post a short reflection on ONE of the texts;
- (3) Comment on at least ONE of their classmates' posts in the Texts & Conversation forum;
- (4) Do at least ONE spiritual exercise and post a short reflection;
- (5) Comment on at least ONE of their classmates' Practice Circle posts; and
- (6) Post a short "Spiritual Practice Check-in" reflection, using the prompt provided and/or simply describing how their spiritual practice has gone - or not gone - that week.

Class materials for the week will be posted by the instructor on Saturday evening (about 8 p.m.). Assignments should be completed by students the following Saturday.

**Beyond Moodle.** Much of the work we will do for this class will continue to be done outside of our virtual classroom. Students are encouraged to deepen their understanding and practice of compassion, lovingkindness and joy by reading books, watching films, engaging in regular conversation, attending workshops or events, working on a personal project and/or, best of all, simply PRACTICING.

For example, students in the past have facilitated writing groups in prison, preached, organized a community service project in their congregation, sung at the bedside of those dying, or painted a small canvas weekly. Others have taken part in programs and trainings offered by grassroots organizations, attended family camp, mentored youth coming-of-age, or explored a completely new (to them) spiritual practice like chi running or fly fishing. Still others have focused on deepening their meditation and /or prayer practice.

Our conversations in class - via written posts, artwork, video clips, etc. - will continue to be an essential way in which we learn and challenge and support each other over the semester.

Some students, however, may wish to have more regular and/or intimate conversations about their spiritual practice in person, by phone or skype. This might include weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly conversations with a partner (romantic or otherwise), spiritual director, 12-Step sponsor, therapist, mentor minister, classmate, or several classmates. Such conversations might include discussion of compassion fatigue, mindful parenting, developing self-compassion, or working through past traumas.

Twenty to thirty hours per semester would be an appropriate amount of time to devote to such endeavors for purposes of this class. And/or in terms of actual practice at least 20 minutes a day 3-5 times a week.

In the spirit of accountability - and keeping each of us practicing - students will be asked to do a weekly "spiritual practice check-in" in which they can reflect on their spiritual practice (or lack thereof).

Students are also invited to share with the class - at any time - any "products" that result from their work outside Moodle (e.g., an anthology of poems written by those living homeless, a compassionate care "tool box."

If students would like to devote more time and energy to such work this semester and receive credit, they might consider submitting a request for a complementary, independent reading/study course (e.g., another 1.5 - 3 units) to be supervised by Chris, an advisor and/or other faculty person.

**Course Instructor:** This online course will be taught by Rev. Christine Fry, an ordained Unitarian Universalist minister and SKSM ('96) graduate. Chris has taught a variety of classes at Starr King over the years including:

Forgiveness; Poetry, Illness & Pastoral Care; Health & Healing; Religious Education; and Compassion and Moral Repair. Chris lives in Davis, California with her husband, Isao Fujimoto, a professor emeritus at UC Davis and long-time community activist. Their daughter, Esumi, is a junior at New York University.

**Office Hours:** Students will "see" Chris in class often, commenting on their posts, clarifying assignments and offering encouragement. She will also be available to chat with students individually through email and, occasionally, by phone, skype or in person. Students are asked to contact Chris through email (revcfry@aol.com, not her SKSM email) to make arrangements for a phone/skype/in-person meeting. Mondays-Thursdays are the best times to reach her.

### **SPRING 2014 CALENDAR**

February 3: STARTING WHERE WE ARE

February 10: COMPASSION

February 17: LOVING KINDNESS

February 24: JOY

March 3: DEVELOPING SELF-COMPASSION

March 10: TONGLÉN MEDITATION

March 17: SERVICE

March 24: READING WEEK

April 7: EXPANDING THE CIRCLE

April 14: LOVING OUR ENEMIES

April 21: COMPASSION FATIGUE

April 28: PATIENCE & EQUANIMITY

May 5: REJOICING

May 12: SUSTAINING OUR PRACTICE

May 19: IN CELEBRATION & GRATITUDE

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