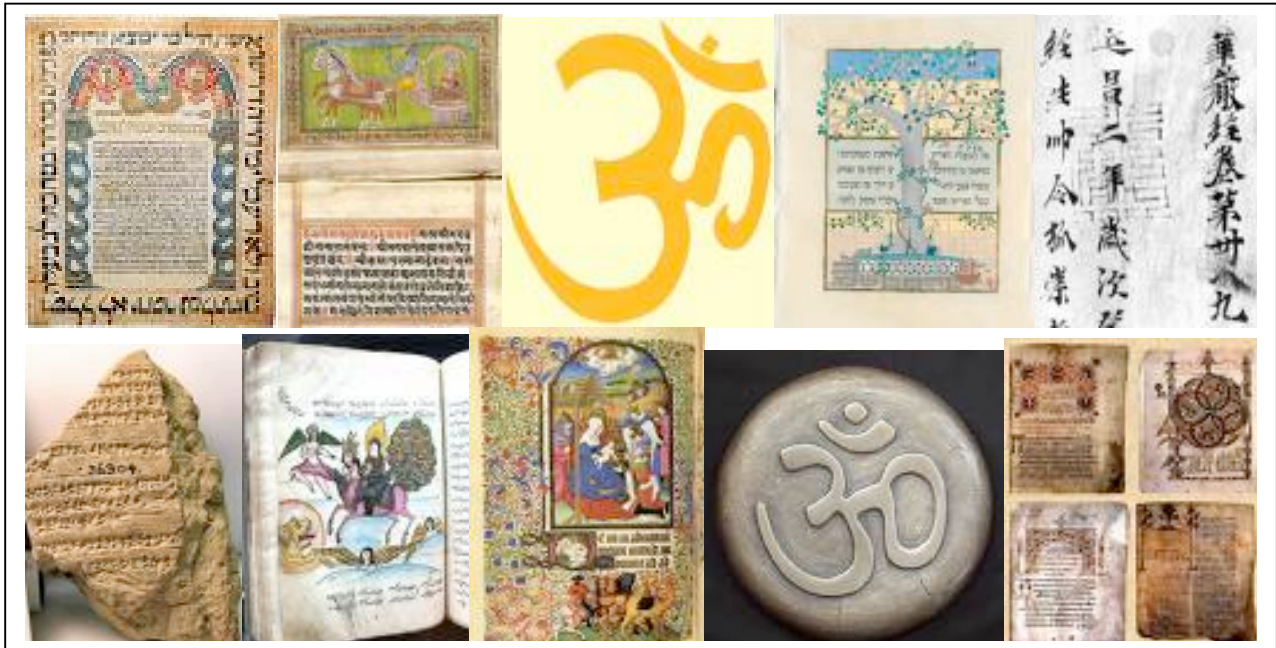


Sacred Texts



The Evergreen State College

Fall Quarter 2008

Faculty: Rebecca Chamberlain Phone ext. 867-5845 email: chambreb@evergreen.edu

Meeting Times: Thursdays, 6-10 p.m.

Location: Sem II C 1105

Required Fees: waived

Credits: 4 upper division

There is One Holy Book, the sacred manuscript of nature, the only scripture which can enlighten the reader. The Sufi has in all ages respected all sacred scriptures, and has traced in them the same truth which he reads in the incorruptible manuscript of nature, the perfect and living model that teaches the inner law of life. To the eye of the seer every leaf of the tree is a page of the holy book that contains Divine Revelation.

--Hazrat Inayat Khan

This survey of ancient sacred texts will explore their poetic and literary influence, past and present. How do sacred texts frame philosophical, moral, ethical and spiritual insights? What is their role in developing culture, identity, and community? How have these texts inspired lives of both contemplative mysticism and of active social-justice? How are sacred texts passed on through rituals, recitations, and illuminated or printed manuscripts? What is the impact of modern poetic translations? What is the relationship of text to somatic practices and oral traditions? How does our understanding of ancient texts help us understand the natural world in vital ways? What impact have texts--sacred or profane--had on the psyche, imagination, social or political understanding of peoples, ancient and modern? What role have these texts had in the past, and what role do they serve today? We will explore our studies through an interdisciplinary lens of comparative literature, history, mythology, philosophy, psychology, religious studies movement, and the arts, as well as through an ecumenical dialogue that affirms both religious and secular perspectives.

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We will combine rigorous academic inquiry and poetic insight, with somatic and contemplative practices such as yoga, meditation, and performance. We will look at selections of chants, invocations, and ancient creation myths, as well as contemporary translations of Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Muslim, and Christian texts, both canonized and apocryphal, as well as from medieval traditions. We will also look at one contemporary novel that synthesizes insights from various spiritual traditions. Our survey will explore the role that these texts have had historically, and the impact they have in our contemporary world.

Underneath all the texts, all the sacred psalms and canticles, these watery varieties of sounds and silences, terrifying, mysterious, whirling and sometimes gestating and gentle must somehow be felt in the pulse, ebb, and flow of the music that sings in me. My new song must float like a feather on the breath of God.

--Hildegard of Bingen

I. Required Texts: We will read selections from the following texts, along with other readings, both ancient and modern. They are numbered according to the order in which we will read them. See weekly reading schedule for details.

7. Cirker, Blanche, ed. *The Book of Kells: Selected Plates in Full Color*. New York: Dover Publications, 1982.
4. Feng, Gia-Fu, Jane English, eds. *Tao Te Ching, 25th-Anniversary Edition*. By Lao Tsu. New York: Vintage, 1997.
5. Lhalungpa, Lobsang P. Trans. *The Life of Milarepa: A New Translation from the Tibetan*. By Anonymous. XX: Penguin, 1992.
6. Mitchell, Stephen. *The Book of Job*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1992.
8. _____. *The Gospel According to Jesus: A New Translation and Guide to His Essential Teachings for Believers and Unbelievers*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1993.
3. _____. *Bhagavad Gita: A New Translation*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2000.
2. Novak, Philip. *The World's Wisdom: Sacred Texts of the World's Religions*. San Francisco: HarperOne. 1995.
1. Roberts, Elizabeth and Elias Amidon, eds. *Earth Prayers From around the World: 365 Prayers, Poems, and Invocations for Honoring the Earth*, San Francisco: HarperOne, 1991.

Optional Texts: Select ONE of the following texts, in either section.

OR

9. Barks, Coleman, et. al. Trans. *Essential Rumi*. By Jalal al-Din Rumi. New York: HarperOne 1997.

Hirshfield, Jane, ed. *Women in Praise of the Sacred*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1995.

OR

10. Hesse, Hermann. *Siddhartha*, XX: MassMarket/Bantam Classics, 1981.

Kazantzakis, Nikos. *The Last Temptation of Christ*. New York: Simon Schuster/Scribner, 1998

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

--Psalms 119:105

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In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.

--John 1:1

Better than a thousand hollow words, is one word that brings peace.

--Buddah

On Line Reserve: Some weeks, we will have additional or supplemental readings available through electronic reserve in the library. These may include various Creation Stories, Articles on Cosmology, lectures or articles by Henry David Thoreau, Ghandi, Martin Luther King, Judith Lassiter, or other writers and activists who draw inspiration from these ancient traditions.

Additional Resources: We will create a resource of texts and sources throughout the quarter. You might begin by getting a copy of the *Torah*, *Koran*, or *King James Bible* for reference. We may also reference African, Egyptian, Celtic, Native American, or other traditions. There are also copies of various sacred texts online, such as:

<<http://www.sacred-texts.com/index.htm>>

Everyone will be handed the dream, but not everyone will be awake to accept it.

--Standing Elk

Do you have the patience to wait until your mud settles and the water is clear? Can you remain unmoving until the right action arises by itself?

--Lao Tzu

II. Expectations:

- Faithful attendance and full participation at all meetings, workshops, films, and seminars.
- Reading and writing weekly reading responses to the texts.
- Maintaining a portfolio of class handouts, notes, papers, research, and cumulative work for the quarter. These will be reviewed during the fifth week and week nine.
- Successful completion of individual and group projects, presentations, workshops, and other assignments on time.

His disciples asked him and said to him, "Do you want us to fast? How should we pray? Should we give to charity? What diet should we observe?" Jesus said, "Don't lie, and don't do what you hate, because all things are disclosed before heaven. After all, there is nothing hidden that will not be revealed, and there is nothing covered up that will remain undisclosed."

--Gospel of Thomas

III. Course Equivalencies: Students can receive upper division credit for a total of four quarter hours for college level work in the following areas: comparative literature and mythology, or religious studies.

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The pure impulse of dynamic creation is formless; and being formless, the creation it gives rise to can assume any and every form.

--The Kabbalah

IV. Assignments:

1. Reading response” papers each week, turned in promptly at the beginning of seminar (1-2 pages, typed). These papers will allow you to: 1) comment upon the assigned readings, lectures, workshops, and films, and 2) summarize, reflect upon, and integrate program topics, themes, and issues. There will be a total of eight responses over the quarter. (See handout, “Guidelines for Reading Responses,” and “Weekly Reading Schedule” for details.)

2. Illuminated Manuscript: You will create an illuminated manuscript that allows you to play with ideas about the manuscript tradition, the tactile relationship between “word and image,” and how manuscripts can be a “mirror of the self.” We will start this work during an in-class workshop, and you will complete your manuscript outside of class by using a variety of tools and influences to express your vision. (See handout for details.) You must make one color copy, to turn in at the end of the quarter, for a class anthology or “art show.”

3. A short recitation: A presentation or musical performance of a favorite poetic passage or selection from a longer work. The work does not have to be one assigned in class. Many sacred texts began as part of rich oral traditions; they began as sacred stories, poetry, chants, invocations, songs, and rituals. Many of them have survived as part of ceremonial traditions. This is a way to internalize your concept of poetic traditions, ritual performance, and sacred text, as you learn this work “by heart.” You will give this presentation during week five.

4. Daily (or Regular) Practice (and Journal): In order to deepen your experience and discipline of mindfulness, develop a daily practice (or practices) from any tradition or that you create on your own. Your practice can be walking in nature, going to a special place, meditation, yoga, chanting, prayer, tai chi, chi gung, or a sacred ritual of your own creation. You can keep track of dreams, write, draw, dance, play, weed someone’s garden, anything that grounds you in your essential “core-self.” You might try one practice for a few weeks, and then another. The key is to create a regular time or place to attend to your “inner” or intuitive awareness. Your practice is done on your own terms, and can be as long or short as you need it to be—but should be a minimum of 5-10 min. a day, or an hour a week.

Your practice should be something that connects you to an awareness of something bigger or larger than yourself. Some of you may already have a strong practice grounded in a particular tradition that sustains you. You may want to use this as an opportunity to deepen in your routine. However, you don’t have to believe in any particular tradition, religion, image, god, goddess, sacred text, or spiritual teacher; you can simply connect to that aspect of the universe that is larger, wiser than our human awareness. What is your sense of the great Mystery? What is your purpose in life? When you try to stay disciplined, what works, what doesn’t, and why? Be open to the full spectrum of discovery.

Keep a journal of your reflections. You can write, scribble, draw, or doodle. You can write in it every day, or once a week. However, commit to using your journal to reflect on some aspect of your daily practice. This is a private document, and I will not read or evaluate

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it. However, I would like you to show it to me during Week 5, and Week 9. You will find that this may be some of the most important work you do this quarter.

5. A Special Project, that you develop throughout the class. You will give a final performance/presentation of your work in Week 9 or 10: Throughout the quarter, we will be doing a number of writing, research, art, and performance workshops. You will get experience in each of these areas. However, you should select ONE area to develop into a final project or presentation. Your project should relate to some aspect of Sacred Texts, and their influence in our contemporary world. Your presentation must be no longer than ten minutes max. It can be . . . (Choose **ONE** of the following.)

A. **Research Paper, (3-5 pages)** with a class presentation (and one-page handout for each member of the class—optional). Do in-depth research on a topic, theme, or tradition that interests you. Explore a text/manuscript, spiritual teacher, tradition, or historic or contemporary influences on some aspect of Sacred Texts.

B. **An Original Piece of Writing:** Create an original work (3-5 pages) based on your responses to the themes, ideas, symbols, or historic context, ancient or modern found in the Sacred Texts we have been reading. Your work might be:

1. A song(s), poem(s), short story, myth, translation, or other creative piece of writing inspired by Sacred Texts.
2. A personal reflective essay, based on your responses, thoughts, and reactions to various texts, and issues that they illuminate, ancient or modern.

C. **A Performance, Visual, or Creative Arts Project:** Ideas may include . . .

1. Develop an original performance (or group presentation) around a particular topic, theme or issue that is inspired by Sacred Texts.
2. Create a visual art piece based on a particular work or image inspired by readings.
3. Create an original piece of music, or other musical production inspired by readings.
4. Create a short video, radio drama, or other media production.
5. Other creative project idea approved by the instructor.

On Immortality: *Hail Unas! Behold, you have not gone as one dead, you have gone as one living.*
--Egyptian Book of the Dead

Your body being a mental body is incapable of dying even though beheaded and quartered. In reality, your body is of the nature of voidness; you need not be afraid. The Lords of Death are your own hallucinations.
--Tibetan Book of the Dead

Imagination is the real and eternal world of which this vegetable universe is but a faint shadow.
--William Blake

Thinking gives off smoke to prove the existence of fire. A mystic sits inside the burning. There are wonderful shapes in rising smoke that imagination loves to watch. But it's a mistake to leave the fire for that filmy sight. Stay here at the flame's core. --Rumi

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One who has control over the mind is tranquil in heat and cold, in pleasure and pain, and in honor and dishonor; and is ever steadfast with the Supreme Self.

--Bhagavad Gita

We are what we think. All that we are arises with our thoughts. With our thoughts, we make the world.

--Buddah

V. Class Portfolio:

Each student is required to keep a class portfolio throughout the quarter. You will turn it in during the fifth week and during the ninth of the quarter for evaluation. I will return it to you in week ten. Include your name and a table of contents. Record the **topic, number and date of each** item in your portfolio. Each section should be arranged chronologically. The portfolio must be kept in a loose-leaf three ring binder with dividers and should contain the following:

Note: Date and chronologically order each entry

- 1) Table of contents (that includes the following):
- 2) Course syllabus, covenant, and all class handouts
- 3) Notes on lectures, guest speakers, workshops, seminars, films, and in-class workshops. (
- 4) Reading responses for required texts and readings, eight total. Follow format on reading response handout. (A section of reading notes is strongly recommended.)
- 5) Passage of your recitation of a short poem or recitation, song, etc. for Week 5
- 7) Original and one color-copy of your illuminated manuscript. (Keep the original, and turn in the color copy for a group anthology.)
- 8) Your Special Project: This includes multiple drafts of written work, notes you make about your work, comments from peer editing/feedback workshops, research notes, and notes for oral presentations. If your work is a visual arts project, performance, or other medium, it should include your notes on your process.
- 9) Evidence of a Daily (Regular) Practice Journal
- 10) Self and Faculty evaluations

Self and Faculty evaluations are required for this class. Three signed copies on official forms due in week nine or ten. If you turn them in during week nine, I will comment on your self-evaluation, sign it, and return it to you on the last night of class, so you can turn it in to the registrar.

You are free to turn your faculty evaluation in to me, or to my program secretary, Sharon Wendt. I will keep a copy of your self and faculty evaluations, along with my evaluation of you, in my portfolio, and they are collected and reviewed by my Dean.

The feeling remains that God is on the journey, too.

--St. Teresa of Avila

If a man wishes to be sure of the road he treads on, he must close his eyes and walk in the dark.

--St. John of the Cross

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Surrender yourself humbly; then you can be trusted to care for all things.

Love the world as your own self; then you can truly care for all things.

--LaoTsu, *The Tao Te Ching*

VI. Goals:

1. To experience the challenges of reading, interpreting, understanding, talking, and writing about sacred texts, including: an understanding of the culture, religious and historic context, and lives of various influences.
2. To develop a deeper understanding of the poetic, mythic, visual, and religious language of various manuscripts, including: the interplay between word and image, and ability to identify ideas, themes, motifs, metaphors, symbols, patterns, images, rhythms, word-play, and religious or spiritual concepts of various works.
3. To expand your understanding and practice of writing--including editing, revision, and various writing techniques.
4. To create a manuscript, inspired by various sacred texts, using the tools and influences of our contemporary world to express your vision. A copy of your work will be compiled in a class portfolio.
5. To work in groups or individually to research, explore, and develop some aspect of interpretation, meaning, literary criticism, or religious studies based on the themes in at least one work that intrigues you. To develop your ideas into a final project.
6. To practice basic skills and concepts of oral presentation by reciting a section of a poem or sacred text, by participating in oral workshops and presentations, and by giving a presentation of your final project at the end of the quarter.
7. To develop a variety of mindfulness and somatic skills or awareness from various traditions, along with the ability to practice various techniques collectively and individually. This includes the discipline of a daily reflective practice to enhance skills of perception and awareness through journaling and other mindfulness techniques.
7. To transfer the abilities and skills learned in this program to your academic, professional, and personal life.

Deep peace of the running wave to you.

Deep peace of the flowing air to you.

Deep peace of the quiet earth to you.

Deep peace of the shining stars to you.

Deep peace of the infinite peace to you.

--adapted from ancient Gaelic runes

VII. Supplies

1. Yoga Mats: Yoga mats are **required** for October 9th, and 16th, but you will want to bring them for other classes and workshops as well, as we will be doing gentle movement, yoga, sitting on the floor, etc. I have reserved 25 yoga mats for our class every Thursday night. They are available for free at the "Equipment Checkout Room" in the Campus Recreation Center with exchange of your ID. If you own your own mat, you may want to bring it.

Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever.

--Gandhi

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2. For Illuminated Manuscripts November 13th.

We will do a “Word and Image/Manuscript as Mirror of the Self” workshop to begin creating original illuminated manuscripts on Nov. 6th or 13th. I will bring parchment paper for everyone, along with my personal art supplies. However, you should bring your own supplies so you can continue your manuscript on your own. All suggested supplies are available in the Evergreen Bookstore at reasonable prices.

Required: A black “fine-tip” or “water-proof” marker. (You will use this for outlining and creating your “text.”)

Suggested:

- Fine point felt pens of your favorite colors. (You don’t need a whole set, one or two contrasting pens in your favorite colors will do.)
- Colored pencils. (I recommend “prisma-color” pencils, as they have a wax base and are versatile, but bring what you have. Some people also like the water-based “aquarell” pencils. Bring whatever you have. Several will do.)
- Gold or silver metallic pens or markers for outlining.
- Bring other general art supplies that you have, such as erasers, compasses, rulers, tracing paper etc. or any other art supplies that you might want to work with.

*I believe that I can bear on my shoulders whatever you want to say of me, [but]...
Without the energy that lifts mountains, how am I to live?*

--Mirabai, bhakti poet

VIII. Guest Artists and Field Trips: We are fortunate to have a number of remarkable guests joining us in conversation, meditation, and discovery as part of our studies this quarter.

Oct. 16th Nathan Hayes, Living Spirit Yoga—*The Life of a Modern Yogi & Ancient Texts.*

Nathan is one of Puget Sound and the Northwest’s finest yoga teacher and teacher trainer. Since 1998, he has been teaching all levels of yoga, pranayama and meditation, from beginners to advanced, from gentle to vigorous, in a variety of settings (private studios, colleges/universities, corporate, privates) and with persons of all ages, experience and degrees of flexibility. Living Spirit Yoga, a fully integrated and deeply transformational style of hatha yoga that integrates the many different ancient approaches to the practice of yoga and offers a refreshingly balanced, modern and accessible system that facilitates a deep healing at the core. (Website: <http://www.livingspiritryoga.com/>).

Oct. 23rd R.L. Miles, Zen Priest—*The Practice of Buddhism: The Lotus Sutra*

R.L. Miles (Koro Kaisan Miles) is the resident teacher of Open Gate Zendo and cofounder of the Boundless Mind Zen School. A Buddhist practitioner for more than 30 years, Miles has practiced in the Japanese, Korean and Chinese Zen traditions. The tradition of Boundless Mind Zen is non-sectarian, and is based on the understanding that the Enlightened Mind is universal; not limited by, and independent of, any secular or sectarian institutions. (Website: www.boundlessmindzen.org)

*Let the beauty of what you love be what you do.
You must be the change you wish to see in the world*

--Jalal ad-Din Rumi
--Mahatma Gandhi

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Oct. 30th (Week 5) Fieldtrip, mid-quarter retreat, and pot-luck at the instructor's home.

(Please arrive 15 min. early.) We will drink nettle-tea and eat pastries of raw-honey and summer-berries (along with other potluck offerings) in honor our reading of the Life of Milarepa and the Celtic Samhain Festival (All Hallows Eve) that acknowledges ancestors. You will give a recitation of a short poem, song, or story from a sacred text or tradition of your choice. Please bring your portfolios for review.

Joining us this evening, from 6:00-7:00 is...

Geshe Jamyang Tsultrim, M.A. Psychology, —Tibetan Buddhism and Practice

Geshe Tsultrim is the founder of the Nalanda Institute and teaches programs that incorporate foundational, intermediate, and advanced stages of Buddhist philosophy and practice. Each program includes the theoretical roots of the teachings, as well as practical applications for daily living. Jamyang is also a counselor and teacher at The Evergreen State College, whose major areas of study include East-West psychology, philosophy of mind/consciousness, and empirically supported mindfulness studies.

Steven Fenwick, Ph.D.—*Spiritual Experience in Process: Integrating the Traditions*

Steven is a therapist in Olympia who is currently working on a book on process oriented spiritual practice. He has a life-long practice of working in a number of spiritual traditions. As a psycho-therapist, he has roots in Jungian psychology and is a Diplomat in Process-Oriented Psychology, doing work in eco-psychology, family systems, cognitive and transpersonal theories, energy psychology, and a variety of experiential therapies. He has a Ph.D. in Psychology from the Union Institute and University as well as an M.A. in Psychology from Antioch University, Seattle. He is a Licensed Mental Health Counselor, Certified Chemical Dependency Professional, and a Certified Process Work therapist. (email: fenwizard@earthlink.net)

The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone of the arch. --Psalms 118:22

(Also: Matthew 21:42)



The important thing is to not stop questioning --Albert Einstein

Rebecca Chamberlain is a Northwest writer, poet, and storyteller with a background in the arts, humanities, and natural history education. She did her graduate work in Medieval literature and American literature (specializing in Native American language and storytelling traditions). She also works with William Blake, the Transcendentalists, and natural history writing. She teaches a variety of storytelling workshops and writing courses around “place based” themes that include issues of sustainability, eco-criticism, and Northwest history. She has worked for science museums, environmental, arts, and cultural organizations. She currently teaches interdisciplinary programs at The Evergreen State College, and graduate courses in poetry & storytelling for Lesley University. She is also a certified yoga instructor. In her spare time she keeps bees, climbs mountains, and swims in Puget Sound. On July 18th, 2008 (Thoreau’s Birthday), she “summitted” Mount Rainier, and on July 20th, she “summitted” Mt. Baker.