

## **Bret W. Davis, PL 216 Philosophical Perspectives: Asian Thought, Experiential Paths**

### **THE THREE PATHS**

Asian philosophies recognize a plurality of “ways” or “paths” to wisdom (or “enlightenment”). Each of the paths may be most appropriate to a particular type of personality. As we will learn in this class, in Hinduism these paths of spiritual discipline are referred to as “yogas.” *Jnana Yoga* is the path of knowledge, and it is the one which most closely resembles the kind of intellectual study involved in researching and writing an academic paper (although “*jnana*” ultimately refers to a more intuitive and life-changing insight than academic study usually leads to). *Raja Yoga* (also called *Dhyana Yoga*) is the path of meditation, a practice which plays an important role in many Asian schools of philosophy. Last but certainly not least, *Karma Yoga* is the path of action, specifically the action involved in “selfless service” to others in society.

Hence, in order to experientially engage in learning the paths of Asian thought—rather than just learning “about” them from a disinterested distance—this class offers three different Paths from which you are to choose. You should decide which Path is most appropriate for your personal exploration of Asian thought. Together we can ask the question of whether and to what extent these different paths do indeed lead up the same mountain.

Because the Service-learning Path requires some extra initiative and responsibility on your part, on this Path students can receive *up to 5 points extra credit added to your Path grade*. (Extra credit points will be added as follows: Those who earn a C+ or below on the Path grade will receive no extra credit points; those who earn a B- on the Path grade will receive 1 extra credit point; those who earn a B on the Path grade will receive 2 extra credit points; those who earn a B+ on the Path grade will receive 3 extra credit points; those who earn an A- on the Path grade will receive 4 extra credit points; and those who earn an A on the Path grade will receive 5 extra credit points.)

### **MEDITATION PATH**

This Path gives students the opportunity to experience and reflect on the practice of meditation, a practice which plays a central role in both Hindu and Buddhist philosophies. Students who choose this path must fulfill the following requirements:

1. Attend either one of the following Orientations: either Tuesday, Jan. 20, or Thursday, Jan. 22, from 6:00 to 7:30 PM in the Fava Chapel in Hammerman House (near the library). At this and all meditation meetings, you must be seated and ready to begin at 6:00. You are also asked to maintain silence upon entering Fava Chapel.
2. In order to get full credit for the Meditation Path, you must **participate in at least 10 meetings of The Heart of Zen Meditation Group** (see the webpage at [www.loyola.edu/zen](http://www.loyola.edu/zen)), including the Orientation. I will count off 10 points from your Path grade for each attendance number less than that. Participating in less than 6 of these meetings will automatically disqualify you from the Path altogether. This semester the Group will meet in the Fava Chapel in Hammerman House, Tuesdays

and Thursdays, 6:00–7:30 PM. Some meetings are required (see below and on the course schedule). In general, meditation path participants will attend the group meetings in Fava Chapel once a week: in the beginning of the semester, you will commit to coming *primarily* on *either* Tuesdays *or* Thursdays, though you may also come on the other day of the week whenever you wish. Since there are more than twelve weeks in the semester, by coming at least once a week you will be able to easily meet your basic requirement of 10 attendances, even given a cancellation or two for a snow day or other reason. If you miss a day for illness or another reason, you can always make it up by coming twice in a subsequent week.

You will be asked to mark your initials on an attendance sheet in the Fava Chapel each time you are there. You may only sign in for yourself and only on the day for which you are signing in. NOTE: If you forget to sign in, you will not be counted present for that day. (Please don't ask me to remember if you were there on a given day or to "take your word for it"—the only way for me to be fair and objective is if I only count what everyone properly records.) If you come late or leave early, mark ½ next to your initials for that day. *Please be advised that any violation of such policies regarding the meditation attendance sheets will be treated as an Honor Code violation!*

REQUIRED MEDITATIONS: You are required to attend one of the Hindu style meditation sessions with Dr. Leder, which are scheduled for Feb. 10 and Feb. 12 (in Fava Chapel). All meditation path students must attend the Vipassana meditation session with Fr. Borges, which is scheduled for March 19 (room TBA). The Meditation meetings on March 10 and March 12 will be led by Zen Master KOBAYASHI Gentoku, who is the abbot of Shōkokuji, one of the main Zen monasteries in Japan. Be sure not to miss this truly rare opportunity!

3. **Meditate on your own at least twice a week** for about 15–20 minutes. A daily meditation routine is most recommended.
4. **Keep a typewritten log** of your solo and group meditations, with the date/day/time (including length of time)/place/and some brief comments on each experience. Print out and staple a copy of this log to the back of each one of your essay assignments.
5. Participate in periodic class discussion sessions, by responding to questions and by sharing your reflections on your experiences with the other students in the class.
6. **Complete the following reading and essay assignments.** The essays should each be approximately 3 pages (double-spaced) length. Late essays will receive a penalty of one grade increment (e.g. from a B+ to a B) per day. You must turn in a stapled hard copy of each essay at the beginning of class on the due date. Electronic submissions (e.g. as an email attachment) will as a rule not be accepted. Remember to staple a copy of your meditation log to the back of each of your essays. And please remember to write your course and section number (\*PL 216.03) on the top of the first page of each of your essays, under your name.

In grading your essays, here is what I will be looking for: How sincerely is the student engaging in the practice of meditation? (This will be judged by the essay itself, by the attached meditation log,

and by the student's participating in the group meditation meetings.) How seriously has he or she reflected on the practice in light of the course material and readings? How thoroughly has he or she done the readings and how well has he or she been able to relate a number of specific passages to his or her own experiences? How well is the essay itself composed? Has he or she kept a clear and informative log of his or her meditations? You may cite the texts simply by author, title, or HO#, and page number in parentheses, e.g. (Asian Philosophies, 14), (Suzuki, 229), or (HO#2, 182).

Below are the four essay assignments. Be sure to read them well in advance, and note that some of them require extra reading assignments.

a. The first essay is due at the beginning of class on **February 10**. In advance, read carefully the following two introductory texts on the practice of meditation: (1) "The Practice of Recollection" in *The Buddha and His Teachings*, pp. 130–140 (note that some of the instructions are slightly different than our Zen practice); and (2) "Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind" in *The Buddha and His Teachings*, pp. 227–239. In your essay, use these two texts to reflect on your initial attempts to meditate.

b. The second essay is due at the beginning of class on **March 10**. For this essay, relate your meditation experience thus far to what we have learned and read about Raja Yoga (Dhyana Yoga) in Hinduism, particularly in the *Bhagavad Gita* (esp. Chapter 6), but also as implied in the *Upanishads* and Vedanta philosophies. Has your first hand experience with meditation helped you to understand certain ideas and certain passages from our texts? Also, reflect on your experience with the Hindu meditation technique introduced by Dr. Leder, relating it to our study of Hindu thought.

c. The third essay is due at the beginning of class on **March 26**. Read carefully the following two texts on Vipassana (Vipashyana) meditation in Theravada Buddhism: *What the Buddha Taught*, Chapter 7; and "Moral Conduct, Concentration, and Wisdom" in *The Buddha and His Teachings*, pp. 114–121. Experiment in your meditation practice with the methods of meditation described in these texts, then write an essay reflecting on your experiences and experiential understanding of the texts. Also, be sure to attend and include in your essay a reflection on the talk and meditation led by Fr. Borges.

d. The fourth essay is due at the beginning of class on **April 23**. Read carefully the following two texts: (1) "Exchanging Oneself for Others" in *The Buddha and His Teachings*, pp. 157–164; and (2) "Engaged Buddhism" in *The Buddha and His Teachings*, pp. 247–249. Experiment several times with the meditation described in "Exchanging Oneself for Others," and reflect on your experience. Do you think your meditation practice has helped prepare you for a more compassionate engagement with others in your everyday life? Conclude your essay with some final reflections on your experience with the meditation path this semester, highlighting whatever was most meaningful or memorable for you (with the addition of these final reflections, your final essay may run a bit longer than three pages).

The Meditation Path portion of your grade will be calculated as follows: successfully completing the meditation requirements and participating in class reflection = 20%; each of the four essays = 20%. (Note that failure to satisfy the minimum meditation requirements will disqualify you from the Path altogether.)

## SERVICE-LEARNING PATH

Whereas Western philosophy is said to begin with intellectual wonder at the world, many Asian philosophies—Hinduism and Buddhism in particular—begin with the problem of suffering. How can we overcome, or at least deal with on a personal and interpersonal level, human predicaments such as violence, sickness, and death? Their responses to these problems may be able to contribute new perspectives to our concerns with social justice as well as personal happiness. The Service-Learning Path of this course requires a special initiative and commitment from students; it also has the potential to be an eye-opening and deeply fulfilling experience.

Students who choose this Path will be required to attend an orientation session, and spend **20 hours (2 hours per week for ten weeks)** of service at one of the following: the **Don Miller House** (a residential program for adults living with AIDS); **Acts 4 Youth** (a mentoring program for at-risk 9-11 year old boys at Guilford Elementary School); **Soccer Without Borders** (Loyola volunteers will serve as tutors at the program's site at Northeast Middle School); and the **RYP** (Refugee Youth Project, an after-school tutoring and mentoring program for refugee students). For information on these sites, see "PL 216 Service-Learning Information" on Moodle. (I will also consider, on a case by case basis, other service-learning sites, provided that they will work well with course themes, have a similar commitment of weeks and hours, and are not being credited through another course.) In all cases, if you choose this Path it is crucial to fulfill your obligations to your agency – *they will be counting on you.*

Be sure to have a supervisor at your service site sign your **BLUE LOG SHEET** each time you go, and staple this sheet to the back of your final reflection essay. ***Do not lose this sheet, since it is the record of your service hours!***

In addition to the 20 hours of service, Service-Learning Path students will be asked to reflect on their experiences in relation to the course material in both an oral and a written format. We will periodically devote class time to a discussion of your experiences and reflections, and during the course of the semester you will be required to write **four reflection essays**, of approximately three pages (double-spaced) length each. Late essays will receive a penalty of one grade increment (e.g. from a B+ to a B) per day. You must turn in a stapled hard copy of each essay at the beginning of class on the due date. And please remember to write your course and section number (\*PL 216.03) on the top of the first page of each of your essays, under your name. Electronic submissions (e.g. as an email attachment) will as a rule not be accepted.

Your essays will be graded, not on your experiences per se, but rather on the thoroughness with which you reflected on your service experiences in relation to the readings and to the content of our course in general. Here is what I will be looking for: How sincerely is the student engaging in the service activity? How seriously has he or she reflected on the service in light of the course material and readings? How thoroughly have they done the readings and related specific passages to their own experiences? How well is the essay itself composed? You may cite the texts simply by author, title, or HO# and page number in parentheses, e.g. (Asian Philosophies, 14), (Suzuki, 229), or (HO#2, 182).

The due dates and topics of the essays are as follows:

a. The first essay is due at the beginning of class on **February 10**. Choose one of the following two topics. **Topic 1:** Critically reflect on the social and interpersonal background of the clients at your service-learning site in light of the Hindu notion of the four castes; see HO#1 from the *Rig Veda*; and *Asian Philosophies*, pp. 94 (bottom)–96 (note that Koller translates *varna* as “class” rather than the usual “caste,” using the latter term for *jati* or sub-caste). Do you think that in the US we have a social system that is analogous in some ways to the Hindu caste system? Are people born into a social stratum that largely determines the problems they face and the resources with which they must face them? You should also take into consideration the manner in which Upanishadic spirituality calls into question such caste divisions and stresses the oneness of life. See HO#2 and the instructor handout on “The Ethical Implications of the Upanishads.” **Topic 2:** Do the sufferings and joys experienced by the clients (or yourself) appear to be in any sense determined by “the law of karma” (see *Asian Philosophies*, p. 9–10, and *The Bhagavad Gita*, pp. 33–35). Do you think that “karma” is a helpful way to think about each client’s situation, or could it problematically lead to “blaming the victim”? (For a response to this question from a Buddhist perspective, see the handout “Questioning Karma.”) Is there a sense in which difficult situations sometimes paradoxically present us with greater opportunities for spiritual growth? How would you understand your own service experience in terms of karma? Have you ever “reaped karmic rewards” for helping others (or not) in the past?

b. The second essay is due at the beginning of class on **March 10**. Topic: karma yoga. In what sense, and to what extent, could the service work you are doing be considered a kind of “karma yoga”? (See *Bhagavad Gita*, esp. Chapters 3 and 4, as well as pp. 94–95 and 256–257; also see Easwaran’s Introduction to the *Gita*, pp. 51–59.) Does it seem to be bringing about any kind of inner change in you since you started, as a yoga might? Are there ways in which you find it difficult not to be “attached to the results,” and do you think that brings about any degree of suffering for you or others? How about the efforts of those who work professionally at your service site, or any of the clients you have met? Do any of these people seem to be a true karma yogi?

c. The third essay is due at the beginning of class on **March 26**. Topic: The Four Sights and the Four Noble Truths. In what sense, and to what extent, could your experience of stepping off Loyola campus to work with people in less fortunate circumstances be compared to Siddhartha’s eye-opening experience of going outside the walls of his father’s kingdom, where he had “the Four Sights [or Signs]” (see *Asian Philosophies*, pp. 38 (bottom)–40; and *The Buddha and His Teachings*, pp. 7–9)? To what degree do you think the Buddha’s teaching of the Four Noble Truths, including the Eightfold Path (see *Asian Philosophies*, pp. 43–51; *What the Buddha Taught*, Chapter Five; and *The Buddha and His Teachings*, pp. 99–114), gives the best diagnosis and prescription for overcoming the forms of *dukkha* (suffering) that you have witnessed?

d. The fourth essay is due at the beginning of class on **April 23**. Topic: Buddhist Meditation and Compassion. Read the following two texts: (1) “Exchanging Oneself for Others” in *The Buddha and His Teachings*, pp. 157–164; and (2) “Engaged Buddhism” in *The Buddha and His Teachings*, pp. 247–249. Using these texts as guides, try to meditate for 15–20 minutes before going to your service site a few times. Do you think that Buddhist meditation can help enhance your service to others?

What do you think of Buddhism's emphasis on the need to transform oneself in order to truly help others? Does your service experience help you to understand the convergence of wisdom and compassion expressed in the Mahayana ideal of the Bodhisattva? Conclude your essay with some final reflections on your experience with the service-learning path this semester, highlighting whatever was most meaningful or memorable for you (with the addition of these final reflections, your final essay may run a bit longer than three pages).

The Service-Learning Path portion of your grade will be calculated as follows: successfully completing service requirements and participating in class reflection = 20%; each of the four essays = 20%. (*Note that failure to fulfill your basic obligations to the agency will disqualify you from the Path altogether.*)