

Course Description
Mindfulness Meditation and Buddhist Teachings:
A Path to Insight, Peace, and Wisdom

Instructor's Course Description

Stress is a major component of academic life, but the huge and obvious question remains unanswered. How can we deal with stress in this environment and perhaps even heal it? In this course students will be introduced to mindfulness meditation, which can heal stress, lead to the end of suffering, and invite us to embrace our lives with equanimity, gratitude, and joy.

This course will also investigate basic Buddhist teachings and will apply them, along with the tools of literary analysis, to Biblical narratives such as the creation story, the Garden of Eden, the life of Jacob, and the Book of Job. This approach reveals unexpected insights into fundamental questions of birth and death, ego and enlightenment, sickness and health, insights that speak in surprisingly relevant ways to spiritual seekers and to those who want to heal themselves. No background in meditation or literature is required.

Mindfulness can help us interpret the narratives of the Torah and decode their wisdom because their mode of exposition is pure mindfulness, the calm and direct awareness, without judgments or concepts or ego, of what the characters are doing and saying. The text offers no analysis, no embellishment, hardly any descriptions, essentially no insight into motive or emotion; it is a text of almost pure observation and sober, nonattached reporting. Why does Abraham agree to sacrifice Isaac? Why does Rebekah favor Jacob over Esau? Why does Isaac allow himself to be duped into giving Jacob the blessing that is intended for his firstborn son Esau? The text gives no answers. The reader must create meaning herself by filtering the text through her own life experiences.

The instructor is a professor of mathematics and an adjunct professor of Judaic studies. He has led many meditation groups and has worked with graduate students in his department on issues of stress. He has also taught many classes on the Hebrew Bible as literature. This honors seminar was first offered by him in the spring semester of 2016.