

Meditation and Virtue
Philosophy 130

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Office Hours: Tuesday 2:30-4:30 p.m., Thursday 9:00-11:00 a.m., and by appointment.

I. Texts

Rosenberg, Larry. *Breath by Breath: The Liberating Practice of Insight Meditation*. Boston: Shambhala, 1998.

Salzberg, Sharon. *Lovingkindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness*. Boston: Shambhala, 1995.

Solomon Schimmel, *The Seven Deadly Sins: Jewish, Christian, and Classical Reflections on Human Psychology*.

New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Selected photocopied readings

II. Class Goals

What is the good life? Does life have a meaning? If it does have meaning, what is it? If it doesn't have meaning, should we worry about it? Do some attitudes make life better? If so, which ones? This class focuses on these and other basic questions in moral philosophy. Like other philosophy classes we will approach these questions through analyzing philosophical texts. Unlike other philosophy classes we will also approach these questions from the perspective of contemplative practice. A central component of the class is to develop the practical skills in meditation and then use those skills to approach questions in moral philosophy.

III. Grading

Meditation practice	25%
Gratitude journals and participation	25 %
Reading quizzes	25%
Final exam	25 %

Meditation Practice: To develop the skills of meditation you will be asked to take up a daily meditation practice beginning at 15 minutes a day and working up to 45 minutes a day (not necessarily in one continuous period). Each Monday you will be asked to turn in a weekly report form indicating the amount of time you meditated for every day of the preceding week. The report form may also require that you answer a short question. The practice component is a required part of this course.

Consequently, the course will not be suitable for you unless you are prepared to meditate on each day of this term.

Daily Practice Minima

March 31-April 6	15 minutes (sitting)
April 7-13	20 minutes (sitting)
April 14-20	25 minutes (sitting and/or walking)
April 21-27	30 minutes (sitting and/or walking)
April 28-May 4	35 minutes (sitting and/or walking)
May 5-11	40 minutes (sitting and/or walking)
May 18 -June 6	45 minutes (sitting and/or walking)

Gratitude Journals: Others commonly benefit us, and even when they don't there may be many things in our lives (large or small) that we may be thankful for. One assignment for the class is that you take notice of the things that can be the object of your gratitude and record them in a daily journal. This does not require a great deal of writing, making a short list is sufficient, but it does require that you reflect and journal every day. On each Monday you will be asked to turn in your journal entries.

Participation: Your attendance and your level of participation in class will be factored together with the grades you receive on your gratitude to determine your journal/participation grade.

In addition to in class participation you should:

- Visit me during office hours at least once before the end of 7th week to discuss your meditation practice.
- Download or stream a talk on meditation from www.dharmaseed.org and summarize it (one half to one page long). There are talks by Larry Rosenberg and Sharon Salzberg at this site, but you can choose to listen to any talk that you wish. Your summary is due the Tuesday of sixth week.
- Attend the Björklunden weekend retreat. This is an important part of the class, so please do not schedule anything else for this weekend. Students who have a legitimate excuse for not attending will write a paper instead.

Reading Quizzes: You will have ten quizzes to test your knowledge of the readings. The quizzes will be available on Moodle at the end of each week, opening on Friday at 4:20 p.m. and closing the following Monday at 11:55 p.m. You can review your notes and/or the readings before you take the quiz, but you should put all material away before you take the quiz. During the quiz you should consult no references other than your memory. This is an essential part of the course and your ability to learn the course material. You should take the quiz even if you miss class. Except for extraordinary circumstances, make up quizzes will not be given.

Final Exam: Your final exam will be ½ essay and ½ true/false. The possible essay questions will be distributed before the exam.

IV. Schedule

Week 1: March 31—April 4

Mon: Introduction

Wed: Larry Rosenberg, “Finding My Way” and “Breathing with the Body.”

Fri: Jonathan Bennett, “The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn,” Epicurus, “The Pursuit of Pleasure.”

Week 2: April 7—11

Mon: Jeremy Bentham, “Push-Pin and Poetry,” John Stuart Mill, “Higher and Lower Pleasures,” Voltaire, “Story of a Good Brahmin.”

Wed: Larry Rosenberg, “Breathing with Feelings,” Christina Feldman, “Suffering is Optional.”

Fri: Aldous Huxley, “The Right to be Unhappy,” Robert Nozick, “The Experience Machine,” W. E. H. Lecky, “The Saints of the Desert.”

Week 3: April 14—18

Mon: Larry Rosenberg, “Breathing with the Mind.”

Wed: Albert Camus, “The Myth of Sisyphus,” Richard Taylor, “Is Life Meaningful?” Thomas Nagel, “Meaning.”

Fri: Larry Rosenberg, “Breathing with Wisdom.”

Week 4: April 21—25

Mon: John Finnis, “The Basic Values,” Derek Parfit, “What makes Someone’s Life Go Best?”

Wed: Thomas Hurka, “The Recursive Account” and “Merits and Implications.”

Fri: Larry Rosenberg, “Breathing with Daily Life” and “The Condensed Method: Breathing with the Way Things Are.”

Fri-Sun: Weekend retreat at Björklunden. Bus leaves Lawrence at 6pm on Fri. Bus leaves Björklunden at 2pm on Sunday.

Week 5: April 28—May 2

Mon: *No Class*

Wed: John Dorris, “Character and Consistency” and “Moral Character, Moral Behavior.”

Fri: Matthieu Ricard, “Happiness and Altruism: Does Happiness Make Us Kind or Does Being Kind Make Us Happy?” Sharon Begley, *Train Your Mind, Change Your Brain* (selections).

Week 6: May 5—9

Mon: Patrick Boleyn-Fitzgerald, "Gratitude and Justice," Robert Emmons and Michael McCullough, "Counting Blessings Versus Burdens: An Experimental Investigation of Gratitude and Subjective Well-Being in Daily Life."

Tues: Summary of a www.dharmaseed.org talk due by the end of office hours.

Wed: Sharon Salzberg, "The Revolutionary Art of Happiness" and "Relearning Loveliness."

Fri: *Reading period*

Week 7: May 12—16

Mon: Solomon Schimmel, "The Persistence of Sin" and "Pride."

Wed: Sharon Salzberg, "Facets of Lovingkindness" and "Hindrances to Lovingkindness."

Thurs: Meditation interviews should be completed before the end of office hours.

Fri: Sharon Salzberg, "Working with Anger and Aversion," Solomon Schimmel, "Anger."

Week 8: May 19 – 23

Mon: Schimmel, "Lust," Philip Moffit, "The Yoga of Relationships."

Wed: Solomon Schimmel, "Sloth," Phillip Moffitt, "Lost in Doubt?"

Fri: Sharon Salzberg, "Breaking Open the Loving Heart," William Godwin, "The Archbishop and the Chambermaid."

Week 9: May 26—30

Mon: *Memorial Day*

Wed: Sharon Salzberg, "Developing the Compassionate Heart."

Fri: Sharon Salzberg, "Liberating the Mind through Sympathetic Joy," Solomon Schimmel, "Envy."

Week 10: June 2—6

Mon: Solomon Schimmel, "Gluttony" and "Greed."

Wed: Sharon Salzberg, "The Gift of Equanimity," Epictetus, "A Stoic View of Life."

Fri: Sharon Salzberg, "The Power of Generosity" and "Living our Love."

Final Exam: 6:30 p.m. Monday, June 09.