

Institute of Buddhist Studies

Graduate Theological Union

Course Description and Syllabus

Course: **HR 5160 Topics in Buddhist Pastoral Care:
Buddhist Perspective on Grief and Loss**

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Semester: Spring 2013
Time: Thursdays 9:40 AM – 12:30 PM
Dates: Feb. 4 to May 24
Location: JSC 130
Units: 3

DESCRIPTION OF COURSE CONTENT

Buddhist teachings on grief, loss and how we negotiate them are an important element of Buddhist pastoral care and have much to contribute to effective pastoral care in a wide range of settings. Particular focus in this class will be given to Buddhist understandings of the process of grief and loss, the healing and transformation that is possible, and the practices that facilitate them. Relevant material from psychological and counseling literature will be included as well as pastoral methods and principles for working with groups as well as individuals. The importance of culture and the impact of social factors will be considered in all aspects of our study.

Seminar/lecture/discussion and skills practice. There are *no prerequisites* for this course. Previous study of Buddhist teachings will add depth in the course but is not required.

SUMMARY OF EDUCATIONAL PURPOSE AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES

I. Outline of Content

This class will address the following key areas:

1. Relevant Buddhist doctrine/teachings and practices:
 - a. Core teachings: interdependence, impermanence, and suffering, the nature of self, Buddha's encounters with old age, sickness, death and a renunciate.
 - b. Practices: meditation (mindfulness practice, zazen, and other Buddhist meditation practices); contemplation (reflection on one's own death, one's interdependence, and the cultivation of gratitude); rituals (funerals, personal rituals of grief and connection, community activities and rites).
 - c. The role of faith and the contributions Buddhist teachings and practices can have for multi-faith settings.
2. About grief: definition, dimensions, cultural norms & distinctions, theories of healing grief, relevant psychological contributions to understanding grief and loss.
3. Care for mourners: listening, assessment/intervention/referral, philosophy of caring for the bereaved, grief care skills, boundaries/not taking on suffering of others
4. Self understanding: personal loss history & habitual ways of coping, family of origin conditioning regarding loss, death, grief; sources of strength/faith when coping with loss; strengths and limitations based on personal and professional life experiences.

II. Educational Goals

1. Introduce relevant Buddhist teachings and practices and their relationship and contribution to the field of pastoral care for mourners.
2. Provide a substantive introduction to the principles and methods of pastoral care for mourners including personal, relational, cultural, and societal factors that impact the process of grieving.
3. Develop essential skills for the pastoral care for mourners such as empathic listening, assessment, appropriate intervention and referral, and an understanding of the role of the community.
4. Deepen each student's ability to engage in honest, kind and fruitful self-reflection as well as the ability to link this self reflective process to the pastoral care relationship when working with grief and loss. Included in this are an understanding of personal strengths and vulnerabilities, self care, personal practices and boundaries.

ASSIGNMENTS

I. In Class

Participation in class sessions and discussion of teachings and texts; skill building exercises.

II. Meditation/Self Reflection

Commitment to a daily practice such as meditation on the Anguttara Nikaya V.57, from the Upajjhathana Sutta ('Five Remembrances'), prayer, or other practices focused on deepening self-reflection. (*Instruction will be given in class*)

III. Grief Companion Sessions

Student and a partner from class will arrange two 45-minute sessions outside of class time. At one meeting one student will be designated the listener and one the speaker, at the next meeting the roles will be reversed. (*Instruction will be given in class*)

IV. Reading (approx., 50 pages/week)

- Wolfelt, A. (2006) *Companionship the Bereaved: A Soulful Guide for Caregivers*. Fort Collins, CO: Companion Press.
- Worden, J.W. (2009) *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for Mental Health Practitioners*. Fourth Edition. New York: Springer Publishing.
- Course Reader

V. Writing

1. Each week a one-page response paper presented in class for discussion. Topics will be either:
 - a. Response to assigned reading (books & reader). Questions, critiques and opposing positions are welcome.
 - b. Personal grief reflection (*Outline and instruction will be given in class*)
2. Grief Companion Paper: 3-pages, based on learnings from grief companion sessions. (*outline and instruction will be given in class*). Due date: April 11.
3. Five Remembrances Contemplation Practice & Personal Journaling. In this journal you will reflect on your experience contemplating the *Upajjhathana Sutta* (*instruction will be given in class*)
4. Final paper 10–12 page paper developing a theme or specific aspect of class or 5 page paper and class presentation

CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION

- The nature and depth of any course is dependent upon class participation, none more than a class such as this. Regular class attendance and participation are essential elements in the criteria for evaluation.
- Participation in self-reflection and skill building exercises in class.
- Weekly response papers brought to class on the day the material is discussed.
- Grief companion session Paper
- Final 10-12 page paper or 5 page paper and class presentation.

Grading

Pass Fail or Letter grade.

Week 1 - Feb. 7

In class:

Orientation: How to take this course; personal intros; review of syllabus, reader; general principles/practices
Buddhist teachings Part I: Overview

Week 2 - Feb. 14

Preparatory ReadingsReader

Goldstein & Kornfield: *The Three Basic Characteristics*

Hagan: *The Human Situation* and other readings on central Buddhist teachings

Harvey: *Conditioned Arising*

Wallace: *The Spectrum of Buddhist Practice*

Texts

Rosenberg: pp. 1–19; 164–170

In class:

Buddhist teachings Part II: Teachings central to developing Buddhist perspectives
Buddhist tradition of contemplating aging, sickness, dying

Week 3 - Feb. 21

Preparatory ReadingsReader

Common Grief Reactions

Realistic Expectations

Myths About Grief

Walsh-Burke: *Cultural and Spiritual Influences*

Texts

Worden: Chapter 1

Wolfelt pp.95-108

In class:

Observing Loss & Change

Role of culture in our experience and understanding of grief and loss

Week 4 - Feb. 28

Preparatory ReadingsReader

Bays: *Introduction* pp. XXIII – XXVI

Texts

Worden: Chapter 3 & 5

In class:

Defining Types of Loss & Expressions of Grief

Personal Loss History

Secondary trauma and loss experiences

Week 5 – March 7

Preparatory ReadingsReader

Different styles of Grieving

Towards an Understanding of the Going Crazy Syndrome

In class:

Stories of Loss & Mourning I

Grief as Shared Humanity & Compassion cultivation

Week 6 – March 14

Preparatory Readings

Reader

Herman: *Trauma*

Texts

Worden: Chapter 7

In class:

- Stories of Loss & Mourning II
- Unique & Disenfranchised Losses
- Understanding Trauma and its impact

Week 7 – March 21

Preparatory Readings

Reader

Arai, P. *Personal Buddhas, Living With Grief and Loss*

Halifax: *A Buddhist Perspective on Grieving*

Huxter: *Grief and the Mindfulness Approach in Death, Dying and Bereavement Counseling*

In class:

- Buddhist views of loss & approaches to mourning
- Bearing Witness: Personal Reflection/Implications of learnings thus far
- Buddhist ritual as healing practice

March 28 Reading week

Week 8 – April 4

Preparatory Readings

Reader

A Soulful Philosophy of Grief Care

‘Standing With’ Model of Grief Care

Texts

Wolfelt p.3-88 (context & principles of companioning model)

In class:

- Companioning a Mourner; 6 Needs of a Mourner
- Wolfelt’s Approach

Week 9 – April 11

Preparatory Readings

Reader

Changes in Bereavement thinking

Texts

Wolfelt pp.165-180

Worden: Chapter 2 & 5

In class:

- Theories of the Grieving Process/Path of Mourners
- Review of Buddhist teachings and their interface with readings

Week 10 – April 18

Grief Companion Paper Due

Preparatory Readings

Reader

Yamaoka: *Shin Buddhist Ministry: Working with Issues of Death and Dying*

Katagri: *Understanding Life and Death*

Texts

Wolfelt pp. 127-164

In class:

Companionship a mourner: Examples & exercises

Reflection on models of companionship

Further aspects of Buddhist teachings and their meaning for companionship

Week 11 – April 25

Preparatory Readings

Reader

Kisa Gotami & the Mustard Seed story

Greenspan: *story of losing child*

Texts

Worden: Chapter 8

In class

Relevant lessons from Psychology: family systems

Buddhist teachings of impermanence and interdependence

The role of clergy and Buddhist teachings for those grieving

Week 12 – May 2

Preparatory Readings

Reader

Giles: *Beyond the Color Line: Cultivating Fearlessness in Contemplative Care*

Miller: *Thus I have Listened: A Reflection on Listening as Spiritual Care*

Jensen: *Wrong Speech: Knowing When It's Best to Lie*

Ruhl: *Report from the Field: Being an American Zen Buddhist Minister*

In class:

Forms of service to those who mourn

Week 13 – May 9

Preparatory Readings and Assignments

Reader

Selected Poems in Loss and Grief

Review readings, create a grief resource book that has particular relevance to you.

Return to the 5 remembrances and reflect on if/how your relationship to them has changed over the course of the class - in yourself and in relation to others.

Review readings on ritual (and optional reading listed below) create a mourning ritual based on the course material and the readings.

In class:

Exercises in Wayne Muller's *How Than Shall We Live* Reflections

Dharma reflection in pastoral practice

Creating your own practices and resources

Week 14 – May 16

Preparatory Readings

Reader

Caregiver Bill of Rights

Self Care Manifesto

Figley: *Caring for Others without Forgetting the Self*

In class:

Implications of learning: personal and professional

Self-care and resilience

Teachings of no-self in relation to self care

Week 15 – May 23

Final Paper Due

In class:

Student Presentations (for those who choose).

A good Good-bye