

LOVE, ALTRUISM AND COMPASSION

So often we use the words above in our everyday life without really thinking about what they mean or what it would be like to really live by them. This course is designed to challenge students -- academically and personally -- to dig deeper into the meaning of these words and examine their impact on society when they are lived in daily action. We will look at stories of world-renown leaders as well as every day folk whose lives exemplify the words. We will study the religious texts and traditions around the world that hold these terms up as ideals. We will examine the evolutionary, biological and neuroscientific theories that attempt to understand these terms. We will also look at our own lives and at those around us to see where and how these words are activated.

We will utilize readings, class discussions, videos, speakers, trips and projects to realize the goals stated above.

TEXT USED:

We will use a great many handouts from different sources (see Bibliography in the back) but the primary text will be:

Barasch, Marc Ian; *Field Notes on a Compassionate Life: A Search for the Soul of Kindness*; Rodale, Inc.; 2005

Brehony, Kathleen A.; *Ordinary Grace: An Examination of the Roots of Compassion, altruism, and Empathy and the Ordinary Individuals Who Help Others in Extraordinary Ways*; New York: Riverhead books; 1999

Neusner, Jacob and Bruce Chilton, *Altruism and World Religions* (to be published in Nov 2005)

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

REGULAR HOMEWORK

There will be a great deal of reading and reflection in this course. Students are expected to:

- come to class prepared with reading done, reflections written and in hand.
- participate in discussions with pertinent, questful or challenging question and a desire to understand the material
- keep a 3 ringed, looseleaf notebook in which they will write 1-2 page reflections on each of the reading assignments BEFORE coming to class. Sometimes these may be shared with the class, sometimes handed in to the teacher, sometimes not.

PROJECTS

There will be a number of 'special assignments. They are as follows:

- Students will either find on their own or be assigned to explore some of the cutting edge experiments/studies going on in the field of 'love research'. This might include something in psychology, primatology, neuroscience, game theory etc. Students will present their findings to the class.
- Students will find on their own or be assigned to explore the work of an altruist -- famous or not -- that has not been discussed in class and will describe to the class the work that person is doing.
- Students will write an in-class essay examining how some of the neuroscientific findings correlate with religious ideals or practices in general or of a specific tradition.
- As a final project students must do one (or both!) of the following:
 - a) Some kind of compassionate, loving action-project (either on-going or for a period of time) that is other than a school-sponsored community service project. They must then write/produce some form of reflection on the project. The action will be clearer to you as the course continues. The reflection can be anything that others can learn from -- an essay, a poem, a short video, a 10 minute Matter of Faith presentation to the school, a song, an art project etc.
 - b) A report on one of the books on the bibliography that we haven't read as a class. The report is NOT to be a description of the book nor is it to be laden with analysis you've picked up from the internet. It is to reflect your own, thoughtful musings, reactions, questions, difficulties, joys and interactions with the material in the book.

FIELD TRIP

We will take a trip to NYC to visit three places where social action grows out of and is informed by the faith of those in the community. The first place is the Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice, a program in the South Bronx that changes and empowers youth through programs in the arts, environmental and criminal justice issues. In the area where Amadou Diallo was gunned down by police, young Black and Hispanic men speak about what it means to respond with love to a police man who has thrown you on the cement, kicked you and embarrassed you in your community. There is the wall of heroes, a mural that expressed the transformation of it's young artists from angry chaotic feelings to hope and beauty through the writings of people such as The Dalai Llama, Rabbi Marshall Meyers, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Thic Nhat Han, Dorothy Day, Oscar Romero and others.

Next we'll visit a West African mosque with a hunger relief program catering to Muslim dietary laws. (One of only seven in all of NYC) In the early 90's a group of gypsy taxi drivers, desperate over the many killings amongst drivers that were taking place, got together to start a burial association paying for the costs of sending bodies back home and helping the children and widows. It was out of this group this modest mosque was begun. Now, there is an elementary day school, legal and cultural assistance to immigrants and the food pantry as well as daily services. On a Friday there may be as many as 300 people speaking all different West African languages praying toward Mecca.

Finally we'll go to a synagogue that houses a homeless shelter. Here the congregants do what Rabbi Hillel told a seeker: don't do to another what is hateful to you -- all the rest is commentary. This was the impetus to start taking care of the homeless in the synagogue. Each night a different member or family from the synagogue hosts 10 homeless men on the top floor of the synagogue for dinner and a bed. We might also visit a program for the elderly Jewish poor on the upper westside (DOROT) or the lower eastside (PROJECT EZRA). Loneliness, economic hard times, medical problems and the loss of a bygone era are some of the many needs addressed by such programs.

GRADING

Students will be graded on the following:

35% • thoughtful and engaged involvement in both class discussions and assignments (ready on time)

30% • the three special writings and reports: love research, in-class essay, presentation of altruist

35% • the final project

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COURSE OUTLINE

WEEK 1: DEFINING TERMS

<u>DAY</u>	<u>IN CLASS</u>	<u>HOMEWORK</u>
Day 1	<p>So.... What's in our nature????</p> <p>Snippets from "Friends" episode in which Joey and Phoebe argue whether actions are altruistic or self-serving because they make us feel good</p> <p>Mencius' (ancient Chinese philosopher) suggestion that even a hardened criminal would naturally save a child from falling into a well</p> <p>Discuss both regarding human nature</p> <p>What would you do? Ethical dilemma's posed by bioethicists and brain researchers: What would you do if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • you're on a train with no brakes and 1 person on one track, 5 people on the other? • you're on a bridge observing such train next to a very big person whose body could stop it? • a child was crawling into traffic....a child needed a new kidney to live....your five kids all need transplants....etc. • a person is hurt by the side of the road...children are dying all over the world 	<p>Look over course expectations</p> <p>Write down your own (do NOT look them up!!) definitions of the following words: Love, Altruism, Compassion, Empathy, Forgiveness Lovingkindness</p> <p>Write a specific example of someone you know who exemplifies one of these qualities and why.</p>
Day 2	<p>Terms</p> <p>Go over course expectations</p> <p>In dyads and large group, discuss student definitions</p> <p>Go over Stephen Post's "5 Dimensions of Unlimited Love" chesed (Jewish term for mercy/compassion/lovingkindness dharma (Hindu term for compassionate duty) etc.</p>	<p>Read assigned handouts and be ready to describe to others:</p> <p>Group 1: Rachel Naomi Remen stories</p> <p>Group 2 & 3: Kathleen Brehony stories (Chapter 3 or 4)</p> <p>Group 3: Marc Ian Barach Chapter 7</p>
Day 3	<p>Groups summarize readings of ordinary people doing extraordinary acts of altruism</p> <p>Share stories kids wrote</p>	<p>Read handouts from <i>When Elephants Weep</i> And <i>The Ape and the Sushi Master</i></p> <p>Write your reflection</p>

WEEK 2: EVOLUTIONARY BIOLOGY: BEES DO IT, BIRDS DO IT, EVEN APES AND MOLES DO IT

DAY	IN CLASS	HOMEWORK
Day 1	<p>Discuss Readings</p> <p>Explain sociobiology theories on altruism: Trivers and Hamilton -- Reciprocal Altruism & kinship E.O. Wilson and ants Richard Dawkins and the selfish gene</p>	<p>Read handouts on the human brain: David Hogue, <i>Remembering the future, Imagining the Past</i>; (pp 30-49;58-65)</p> <p>Joseph Ledoux, <i>The Emotional Brain</i></p>
Day 2	<p>Video: "The Nature of Human Nature" or "The Social Brain (through films.com, Films for the Humanities and Sciences) OR: Mind Talk: The Brain's New Story</p>	<p>Read Handouts from Candace Pert's <i>Molecules of Emotion</i> and Shelly Taylor's <i>The Tending Instinct</i></p> <p>Write Reflection</p>
Day 3	<p>Discuss Explain Damasio's Patient E, V.S. Ramichandran's work Josh Greene's work with MRI's and ethical decision making</p>	<p>Begin researching the research on assigned scientific experiments on love and altruism from Stephen Post's "Funding Research Projects" <i>Unlimited Love: Altruism, Compassion, Service</i></p>

WEEK 3: BRAIN WORK CONT'D

DAY	IN CLASS	HOMEWORK
Day 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Explain work on Mirroring experiments with Apes •Michael Gurian on Soul as Light 	<p>Continue research -- Be prepared to describe it next class.</p>
Day 2	<p>Share research</p>	<p>Read <i>Field notes on a Compassionate Life</i>, Chapter 6: Heart Science, Heart's Mystery</p>
Day 3	<p>Discuss Go over Hinduism Terms and ideas</p>	<p>Read <i>Ramayana</i> Write down your</p>

		reflections
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WEEK 4: ASIAN RELIGIONS

DAY	IN CLASS	HOMEWORK
Day 1	Hinduism Dharma in action: <i>Ramayana</i> : Rama, Sita and Hanuman Bhakti and Karma Yoga: Bhagavad Gita	<i>Bhagavad Gita</i> reading Write your reactions to Arjuna's predicament and Krishna's advice
Day 2	Discuss Watch parts of <i>Mahabarata</i> and/or parts of "Ghandhi" video In dyads, discuss dharma situations -- what would you do?	Read sayings of Confucius, Chuan Tzu and Mencius
Day 3	Discuss classical and neo-Confucianism with local professor Or use video	Read The Dalai Lama, <i>An Open Heart</i> pp.5-25;91-97;119-125 Write reflection

WEEK 5: ASIAN cont'd

DAY	IN CLASS	HOMEWORK
Day 1	Show "Compassion in Exile: The 14 th Dalai Lama" video	Write a reflection
Day 2	Buddhism The Buddha: who was he, what did he do? The Heart Sutra: What does it mean to love everyone as if they are your/you are their mother? Exercise: Write a letter as if you were the mother of someone you <i>really</i> don't like then discuss in dyads	Thich Nhat Hanh reading on Love in Action
Day 3	Discuss Thich Nhat Hanh and Dalai Lama readings Explain the concept of the Bodisattva Tell and discuss Jhakarta story	Read Biblical selections

WEEK 6: WESTERN TRADITIONS

<u>DAY</u>	<u>IN CLASS</u>	<u>HOMEWORK</u>
Day 1	Discuss Abraham, Moses, Ruth, Deuteronomy 6, Prophets	Martin Buber, <i>I-Thou</i> , pp.3-18
Day 2	Discuss reading	Rami Shapiro on chesed Barry Holtz on tzedakah and mitzvah
Day 3	Discuss readings Tell Baal Shem Tov stories Listen to Eli Wiesel story	Read Matthew Chapters 5, 6, 9, 13 Read M. Borg handout (pp.46-50;58-61)

WEEK 7: WESTERN TRADITIONS

<u>DAY</u>	<u>IN CLASS</u>	<u>HOMEWORK</u>
Day 1	Discuss Jesus stories and actions: Transformational love in action: Paul John 4:16 Philocia	Read Henri Nouwen handout, <i>Life of the Beloved</i> Write a reflection
Day 2	Richard Attenborough's "Mother Theresa" video	Read MLK's " <i>Letter from a Birmingham Jail</i> "
Day 3	Discuss Listen to MLK "Drum Major Instinct"	Start thinking about paper correlating religious idea(s) to neuroscientific research

WEEK 8: WESTERN

<u>DAY</u>	<u>IN CLASS</u>	<u>HOMEWORK</u>
Day 1	Islam: Muhammed: His life and sayings the tenets and practices that lead to ummah, community, ie., Chicago muslim's celebrate Eid al-Adha	Read Eboo Patel's article on the Aga Khan Write a reflection
Day 2	•Rumi. Hafiz, Ibn Arabi, Muysic of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan •Interfaith Youth Core Sacred Stories project on hospitality	Review material, think about ideas
Day 3	In class essay: Correlate religious idea(s) to neuroscientific research	What's a mother to do? Write the qualities of a

		good mother
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WEEK 9: OTHER

DAY	IN CLASS	HOMEWORK
Day 1	Mother love: The Goddesses: Kali, Deva, Kwan Yin, Mary, Shekinah, Sophia, Corn Goddess, Mother Earth	"Native American Attitudes to the Environment," by N. Scott Momaday
Day 2	Indigenous cultures Interconnected, holistic	Nelson Mandela reading
Day 3	video of Wangari Matthai	Research and present BRIEF description of assigned altruist (ie., ; Sompop Jantraka; Rabbi Marshall Meyers, Sherin Ebadi; Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Thic Nhat Han, Dorothy Day, Oscar Romero; Raul Wallenberg; Abraham Heschel; Eli Wiesell Chiune Sugihara; Hamid Karzai; Aung San Suu Kyi; Satish Kumar; Kim Dae Jung; Desmond Tutu; Winona LaDuke; Ruby Bridges

WEEK 10:

DAY	IN CLASS	HOMEWORK
Day 1	Present Altruists	No homework
Day 2	FIELD TRIP TO NYC	Write a reflection on the trip and how it relates to discussions/readings/or your work
Day 3	Discuss trip, continue with altruist presentations	read <i>Field Notes on the Compassionate Life: A Search for the Soul of</i>

WEEK 11 : A SEARCH FOR THE SOULS OF KINDNESS

DAY	IN CLASS	HOMEWORK
Day 1	Discuss	Read <i>Field Notes on the Compassionate Life: A Search for the Soul of Kindness</i> pp. 171-202
Day 2	Watch "Play it Forward" a movie about a young boy, challenged by his teacher (Kevin Spacey), who comes up with the idea that instead of "paying back" a kindness, pay it forward. In this way the effects of kindness received multiply.	Read <i>Field Notes on the Compassionate Life: A Search for the Soul of Kindness</i> pp. 203-245
Day 3	Discuss forgiveness How can you do it? What are the effects -- on both parties? What does the research show? Use David Hogue (p.132-133) on ritual as embodied left/right brain understanding of idea such as forgiveness	Write a reflection on with whom and how you might give or ask for forgiveness. Why?

WEEK 12: A SEARCH FOR THE SOUL OF KINDNESS

DAY	IN CLASS	HOMEWORK
Day 1	Work in dyads on questions of forgiveness Discuss in larger group Describe rituals religions have to address forgiveness: ie., Yom Kippur, Confession, etc.	Read <i>Field Notes on the Compassionate Life: A Search for the Soul of Kindness</i> pp. 247-305
Day 2	Parent's Circle/Familie Forum presentation and video. This group is comprised of Israelis and Palestinians who have lost a child, parent or sibling in the fighting and are working together to stop the killing and hate	Write a reflection
Day 3	Discuss Handout pictures for narrative exercise	You have been given a picture of someone from somewhere in the world. They are facing a personal crisis of some kind. Write the story of who this person

		is, what they're going through and why
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WEEK 13: A SEARCH FOR THE SOUL OF KINDNESS

<u>DAY</u>	<u>IN CLASS</u>	<u>HOMEWORK</u>
Day 1	Tell stories Use David Hogue (p. 100) on effect of stories on brain and empathy) Compassionate listening: how do we do it	Kathleen Brehony's <i>Ordinary Grace</i> , Chapter 9 "What I've Learned"
Day 2	Discuss Begin considering environmental issues Discuss work of Teilhard de Chardin	Go to the Forum on Religion and Ecology website. Choose two of the projects listed for the tradition you've been assigned and write up a BRIEF description of what the groups are doing
Day 3	Show "New Story of the Universe" video available through Mary Evelyn Tucker/Kurt Hoelting Go over student findings Look at others making an environmental difference: ie., Green Peace, Green Faith, Sister Miriam at Genesis Farm; MDG: Millenium Development Goals of the UN -- why we need them	Come up with two lists: 1) TV, movies, video games, magazines and books that promote L,A,C and 2)those that demolish, denigrate or destroy them

WEEK 14:WHAT'S WORKING AGAINST US

<u>DAY</u>	<u>IN CLASS</u>	<u>HOMEWORK</u>
Day 1	Media presentations: How do they affect us? "Merchants of Cool" PBS Frontline on advertising and teens	Begin to finalize and reflect upon final projects
Day 2	"Alfie" (the old one with Michael Cain) -- a movie about a charming but quite selfish young man	Write a reflection on "Merchants of Cool" and "Alfie" and you
Day 3	"NOT IN OUR TOWN" documentary film about Billings, Montana "who responded to an upsurge in hate violence by	Work on presentation

	<p>standing together for a hate-free community...[After a number of hate activities}... The police chief urged citizens to respond before the violence escalated any further. Religious groups from every denomination sponsored marches and candlelight vigils. The local labor council passed a resolution against racism, anti-Semitism and homophobia. Members of the local Painters Union pitched in to paint over racist graffiti. The local newspaper printed full-page Menorahs that were subsequently displayed in nearly 10,000 homes and businesses. The community made an unmistakable declaration: "Not in Our Town." Since then, no serious acts of hate violence have been reported in Billings."</p>	
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WEEK 15: PRESENTATIONS

DAY	IN CLASS	HOMEWORK
Day 1	Presentations	
Day 2	Presentations	
Day 3	Presentations	Think about questions for Week 16

WEEK 16: WHICH WAY WILL YOU GO, GEORGE, WHICH WAY WILL YOU GO?

DAY	IN CLASS	HOMEWORK
Day 1	<p>Think back to "Friends" and Mencius discussion</p> <p>Discuss memes, neuroplasticity, the brain and you:</p> <p>Which way will you go...Now what do you think?</p> <p>What are you going to do differently?</p>	
Day 2	Extra day for "snow days" etc.	
Day 3	Extra day for snow days etc.	

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