

---a new course---

**Asian Religions and Ecology**  
**Fall 2002**  
**Robert McDermott**

**Course Description**

This newly created course is offered on the recommendation of Brian Swimme and Mary Evelyn Tucker in response to the perceived need for a thorough study of the significance of world religions for the deepening ecological crisis. Western Religion and Ecology was offered in spring 2001 and was a huge success thanks largely to the students who brought ecological knowledge, experience and commitment to each class and complemented the instructor's knowledge of western religion. This course on Asian religions and ecology will require a similar complementarity and promises to be as successful. The instructor will lecture, as scheduled, on topics, particularly scriptural texts and key concepts, which provide necessary background for an informed discussion of the essays in the Harvard CSWR Series.

**Requirements**

Each student will be required to bring to each class session appropriate questions and comments on the assigned readings. Students will be urged to present a twenty-minute summary of the assigned reading for at least one class. Students will also be required to submit 20-25 pages of carefully written analysis of the course material using at least two of the assigned books. This written assignment can be submitted (and will be swiftly returned with comments) in portions (e.g., two 12-page or three 8-page papers) any time during the course.

**Readings (in order of use)**

J. Baird Callicott and Roger T. Ames, eds., *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought: Essays in Environmental Philosophy*. SUNY 1989.

Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryuken Williams, eds., *Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnection of Dharma and Deeds*. Harvard University Press, 1997.

Christopher Key Chapple and Mary Evelyn Tucker, eds., *Hinduism and Ecology*. Harvard University Press, 2000.

Witter Bynner, trans. *The Way of Life according to Lao Tzu*. Putnam/Perigree, 1944

**Instructor's Personal Note:** During the first class I will lead a discussion on the impact of the physical setup of the room and pedagogical process, including lighting, tables, computers, eating, drinking, voice, posture and eye contact on our learning and on the ideal of a shared mental, psychic and spiritual space. I hope to convince the class that it is to the advantage of all participants to collaborate in creating an intimate and intensely engaging atmosphere, and in fact at least to strive to transform each class session into an etheric body.

As this is not an ideal that can, or should, be legislated by myself as instructor, I will make my case and then abide by the will of the class expressed on unsigned statements of preference. I will also advocate that we shift the grade expectation away from 'A's' to a more revealing range of grades from A+ to B-. Anyone for whom the prospect of a grade less than 'A' would be problematic should consider registering P/F. I will be eager to have

conversation time with each student by appointment, and preferably not during office hours.

## Asian Religions and Ecology

### Schedule of Classes and Readings

1. Introduction to the course  
Lecture: History, structure, functions, characteristics of religion
2. *Hinduism and Ecology: I: 1-100*  
Lecture on the Vedas, Upanishads and Dharma-shastras
3. Cont'd.: I, cont'd: 101-82  
Lecture on the Bhagavadgita
4. Cont'd.: II, 183-241; III: 245-90  
Lecture on Gandhi
5. Cont'd.: IV, 339-450
6. Cont'd.: V: 453-527
7. *Buddhism and Ecology: I; II*  
*Nature: IV, 213-56*  
Lecture on the essential teachings of Buddhism [mid-course evaluation]
8. *Buddhism and Ecology: III, 71-128*  
*Nature: III, 153-213*
9. *Buddhism and Ecology: IV, 130-60; V, 165-80; VII, 269-325*
10. *Buddhism and Ecology: VI, 187-266*  
Lecture on the history of American Buddhism
11. *Buddhism and Ecology: VIII, 327-400*  
*Nature: Epilogue, 279-289*
12. *The Way of Live According to Lao Tse (entire)*  
Lecture on the *Dao te Ching*
13. *Nature: Intro.; II--The Chinese Worldview, 67-153*
14. *Nature: III--The Japanese Worldview, 153-212*
15. Student reports; conclusions [course evaluation]