

Seeking Religious Literacy Group Study Guide

This resource is designed to help you understand the key concepts of this course, supporting your learning journey whether you are a facilitator or a student.

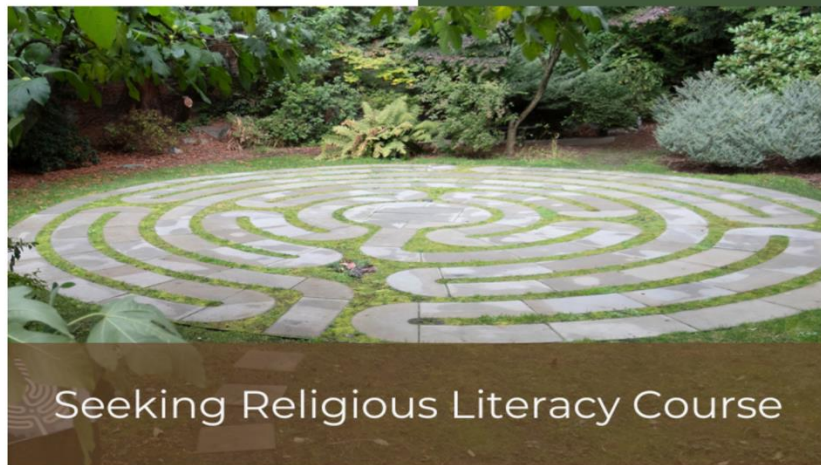


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WELCOME

Welcome to **Seeking Religious Literacy**. This resource was developed in 2022 through a partnership between Seattle University's Center for Ecumenical and Interreligious Engagement and the Parliament of the World's Religions. We believe that *respect for religion itself and an appreciation of its myriad forms in the world strengthens our ability to work with each other toward a just and harmonious society*.

This course is designed to help you gain greater awareness- or literacy- about the reality of religious worldviews today. Our values and stories all come from a rich background of worldviews, faith traditions, or spiritualities. **Religious literacy** is the ability to discern and analyze the role of religion in personal, social, political, professional, and cultural life. Nurturing this capacity helps us to understand our neighbors with more empathy and engage one another with intelligence and insightfulness.

Participants are encouraged to learn, grow and share, especially what they have learned in their own life that was influenced by belief, cultural background, community and by connection to one another and to the earth. All are encouraged to approach the course with an openness to learn and to grow.

The course is comprised of five modules and a brief conclusion. The arc of the modules travels across the sky in a single day from twilight to twilight; to remind all of us that building literacy requires a lot of time. Each of the five modules provides six main movements: lecture, engage, reflect, lecture, engage, discuss. You are invited to use whichever materials work for your context.

A printable copy of the lecture is available for download. Accompanying each lecture, you'll find additional resources for your engagement-podcasts, stories, blogs- created by people like you who draw upon the stories of their lives and communities. These are listed in each module for the facilitator, located online, and collected in the **Participant Resources** section of this study guide.

The reflection section of each module is where participants are asked to take time with the questions. Before engaging in discussion with your group, we recommend reviewing the guidelines we have included for respectful discussion (Student Participation and Engagement, p.27), or creating your own norms for discussion and sharing.

We encourage facilitators to learn from and share with one another in our **Facilitator Forum** in the Canvas resource. Facilitators may also supplement with additional resources from your tradition, your context and current events to ground this work further.

Gathering Frameworks

There are several ways you can structure your gatherings through the course. Each facilitator will have to decide the best approach for their context.

Some suggestions include:

- 60 minutes (5 weekly sessions)
Begin with a brief prayer/centering/grounding (available in the “FILES” tab on Canvas)
Share or review norms
Identify short clips from each lecture to highlight and facilitate discussion
Ask participants to read/watch supportive materials and reflect in their journal
- 60 minutes (10 weekly sessions)
Begin with a brief prayer/centering/grounding
Share or review norms
Watch one lecture together and facilitate discussion
Utilize small groups to watch, read or listen to supportive materials and share them with the class
- 90 minutes (5 weekly sessions)
Begin with a time of prayer/centering/grounding
Develop group norms/discuss and review in subsequent sessions as needed
Watch both lectures and facilitate discussion
Small group discussion of supporting materials
- 90 minutes (10 weekly or monthly sessions)
Engage in a spiritual practice/centering/grounding
Develop group norms/discuss and review in subsequent sessions as needed
Watch one lecture and facilitate discussion
Small group discussion of supporting materials

There are many creative ways to stay connected and engaged in between in-person sessions and to encourage conversation beyond the confines of your gathering time. You can also utilize these tools to support ongoing engagement and skill development.

- Create a private Facebook or Discord group and prompt conversation. We recommend regular monitoring.
- Use email prompts to remind participants to engage with extra podcasts, blogs, and stories.
- Schedule unstructured conversation time via an online platform for more open-ended conversations.
- Schedule visits to local religious communities and time for conversation afterward.
- Share ideas in the **Facilitator Forum** on the Canvas Resource page.

Maintaining a Safe and Enriching Learning Environment

Throughout this course you will likely encounter a variety of ideas and perspectives. In order to maintain a safe and enriching learning environment, respect, compassion, and openness are critical. Below are some guidelines to keep in mind as you engage with your group members. You may want to share this with your group.

- **Actively listen and respond** to participants' ideas or questions.
- **Provide acknowledgement, encouragement and direction.**
 - Follow up with supplementary/additional questions and/or an explanation if responses lack depth or clarity, or if the responses are unfocused.
 - Make constructive suggestions that will support your group in the development of their ideas.
- **Be open-minded.** Be receptive to participants' ideas and consider how they might resonate with your experience and ideas.
- **Always maintain a respectful tone.** Treat your group as you would expect a teacher to treat you.
- **Make "I" statements:** begin with the word "I" followed by a description of the speaker's emotions or perceptions.
- **Avoid generic compliments:** Instead of "Great job!" tell them exactly what they did well.
- **Keep critiques focused on the content, not the person:** If you have a different perspective, explain and support it.
- **Keep questions clear and concise to avoid confusion.** If asking about a specific part of their sharing, reference it specifically.

What is Religious Literacy?

Throughout the course your understanding of religious literacy may grow and shift. Use the grid below – individually and collectively – to explore your growing understanding of the facets of religious literacy.

Religious literacy is the ability to discern and analyze the role of religion in personal, social, political, professional, and cultural life. Nurturing this capacity helps us to understand our neighbors with more empathy and engage one another with intelligence and insightfulness.

<i>personal</i>	
<i>social</i>	
<i>political</i>	
<i>professional</i>	
<i>cultural</i>	

Towards A Global Ethic: An Initial Declaration

© 1Parliament of the World's Religions

The Parliament of the World's Religions was a developmental partner in creating this resource. Their work is rooted in a commitment to a Global Ethic. The Global Ethic is a landmark declaration stating the universal values and principles shared by the world's religious, spiritual, and cultural traditions. The Global Ethic responds to an urgent practical need and a deep spiritual hunger for clear moral guidance on the most fundamental issues of human life and conduct. It expresses a minimal set of principles for committed action in a world torn by violence, religious and racial hatred, oppression of women and minority groups, extremes of wealth and poverty, and the growing threat of climate change and destruction of the natural world. We encourage you to discuss this in your group gathering.

THE DECLARATION OF A GLOBAL ETHIC

The world is in agony. The agony is so pervasive and urgent that we are compelled to name its manifestations so that the depth of this pain may be made clear.

Peace eludes us...the planet is being destroyed...neighbors live in fear...people* are estranged from each other...children die!

This is abhorrent!

We condemn the abuses of Earth's ecosystems.

We condemn the poverty that stifles life's potential; the hunger that weakens the human body; the economic disparities that threaten so many families with ruin.

We condemn the social disarray of the nations; the disregard for justice which pushes citizens to the margin; the anarchy overtaking our communities; and the insane death of children from violence. In particular, we condemn aggression and hatred in the name of religion.

But this agony need not be.

It need not be because the basis for an ethic already exists. This ethic offers the possibility of a better individual and global order, and leads individuals away from despair and societies away from chaos.

We are people¹ who have embraced the precepts and practices of the world's religions:

We affirm that a common set of core values is found in the teachings of the religions, and that these form the basis of a global ethic.

We affirm that this truth is already known, but yet to be lived in heart and action.

We affirm that there is an irrevocable, unconditional norm for all areas of life, for families and communities, for races, nations, and religions. There already exist ancient guidelines for human behavior which are found in the teachings of the religions of the world, and which are the condition for a sustainable world order.

¹ The original text from the *Parliament of the World's Religions* uses "women and men". At the *Center for Ecumenical and Interreligious Engagement* we are committed to using inclusive language, so this has been changed.

WE DECLARE:

We are interdependent. Each of us depends on the well-being of the whole, and so we have respect for the community of living beings, for people, animals, and plants, and for the preservation of Earth, the air, water, and soil.

We take individual responsibility for all we do. All our decisions, actions, and failures to act have consequences.

We must treat others as we wish others to treat us. We make a commitment to respect life and dignity, individuality and diversity, so that every person is treated humanely, without exception. We must have patience and acceptance. We must be able to forgive, learning from the past but never allowing ourselves to be enslaved by memories of hate. Opening our hearts to one another, we must sink our narrow differences for the cause of our world community, practicing a culture of solidarity and relatedness.

We consider humankind our family. We must strive to be kind and generous. We must not live for ourselves alone, but should also serve others, never forgetting the children, the aged, the poor, the suffering, the disabled, the refugees, and the lonely. No person should ever be considered or treated as a second-class citizen or be exploited in any way whatsoever. There should be equal partnership between people*. We must not commit any kind of sexual immorality. We must put behind us all forms of domination or abuse.

We commit ourselves to a culture of non-violence, respect, justice and peace. We shall not oppress, injure, torture or kill other human beings, forsaking violence as a means of settling differences.

We must strive for a just social and economic order, in which everyone has an equal chance to reach full potential as a human being. We must speak and act truthfully and with compassion, dealing fairly with all, and avoiding prejudice and hatred. We must not steal. We must move beyond the dominance of greed for power, prestige, money, and consumption to make a just and peaceful world.

Earth cannot be changed for the better unless the consciousness of individuals is changed first. We pledge to increase our awareness by disciplining our minds, by meditation, by prayer, or by positive thinking. Without risk and a readiness to sacrifice there can be no fundamental change in our situation. Therefore, we commit ourselves to this global ethic, to understanding one another, and to socially beneficial, peace-fostering, and nature-friendly ways of life.

*We invite all people,
whether religious or not,
to do the same.*

You can find out more and download the complete declaration here:

<https://parliamentofreligions.org/globalethic/>

MODULE GUIDE

This guide contains all the content from the Canvas page needed to easily plan the sessions for your group. You can choose the themes, links, reflection and discussion questions you will share with your group. You are welcome to include material of your own to support your group's engagement with this material. Utilize the Facilitator's Forum for additional resourcing. Blank space is intentionally provided for you to use as you wish.

Module 1: Religion- A Worldview and a Way of Life

In this Module we will begin our course by reflecting together about how we understand the nature of "religion." Is it the rich constellation of beliefs, practices, and cultures by which people make the world meaningful? If so, then maybe we are inhabiting a world brimming with numerous religious worldviews that are both fascinating and inspiring to millions.

Lesson 1.1

Lecture: *Religion - A Worldview and a Way of Life* (13:23)

Summary: "Religion" is a word for which there is no broadly agreed upon definition, and yet it names what we are studying in this course. In this lecture, you will hear about several useful ways to think about what "religion" is as a "worldview."

Key Terms: Religion, Worldview, Belief, Practice, Traditions, Mythic/Narrative, Umbrella

Story: Am I a Bad Muslim? <http://religica.org/am-i-a-bad-muslim/>

Podcast: A Life Dedication to Global Interfaith Work & Impact (13:50)

<https://soundcloud.com/religica/swami-chidanand-saraswati-a-life-dedication-to-global-interfaith-work-impact>

Reflection Questions:

- What inspires you about encountering unique religious worldviews other than your own?
- What is your definition of "religion"? How has the content you've learned under Lesson One informed and/or changed how you think about religion?
- As you encounter and engage different religious worldviews, both in this course and in your life, what strategies help you remain open, receptive, and respectful – even when you don't agree with a particular view?

Lesson 1.2

Lecture: *Religion - Worldview, the Sacred, and Myth* (10:50)

Summary: We will "unpack" a few of the main points given in the first lecture, especially about making meaning and "worldview" – and the ethics that accompany any religious worldview.

Key Terms: Religious Worldview, Guiding Stories, Ethical Guidelines, Myth, Cosmogony

Story: Starting with Moksha and Karma Yoga

<http://www.theinterfaithobserver.org/journal-articles/2012/1/13/starting-with-moksha-and-karma-yoga.html>

Story: My Dad Didn't Like Religion, but He Prepared Me for Religious Diversity

<http://www.theinterfaithobserver.org/journal-articles/2019/1/8/my-dad-didnt-like-religion-but-he-prepared-me-for-religious-diversity>

Podcast: Finding a Way: 30 Years of Buddhist Nuns Stepping Up in the World (17:55)

<https://soundcloud.com/religica/karma-lekshe-tsomo-finding-a-way-30-years-of-buddhist-nuns-stepping-up-in-the-world>

Discussion Question:

- What is your sense of how and why religions emerge, adapt or evolve?
- What needs does a religion meet and how do these needs change as a religion develops and adapts?
- You can share about religion generally, or your observations about a religion or worldview with which you identify.

Supplemental Resources:

Video: What are you Seeking? (6:53)

https://seattleu.instructure.com/courses/1592222/pages/what-are-you-seeking?module_item_id=16983257

Article: Storytelling – It's Not Just for Grown-Ups

<http://www.theinterfaithobserver.org/journal-articles/2015/9/3/storytelling-its-not-just-for-grown-ups.html>

Podcast: Melting the Ice in Our Hearts and Understanding Our Inner Depth (15:36)

<https://soundcloud.com/religica/angaangaq-uncle-angakkorsuaq-melting-the-ice-in-our-hearts-understanding-our-inner-depth>

Takeaways:

- Learning always begins with sincere curiosity and respect. These are what create an openness to new ideas and a genuine desire to understand worldviews that may differ from our own.
- Remain open to the multitude of interpretations that exist around stories. Seek awareness of your own stories while also remaining open to the stories of others.
- A religious worldview refers in some way to a fuller reality and source of value, which many have called the Sacred. Consider how you make sense of the Sacred.
- Search for ethical guidelines within the stories of religious traditions. It is important to consider how communities recount their specific history, cultural memory and events, whether legendary or historically verifiable, and look for different or contesting perspectives.
- Remember that nothing is static. Communities and interpretations grow and evolve over time.

Module 2: The Transcendent and the Human

In this Module we will delve into what connects a religious community and look at the journey individuals take across their lifespan in various traditions. In doing so, we will ask key questions that guide us to a greater understanding of the nature of religion at its core.

Lesson 2.1 Lecture: *The Sacred, the Cosmic, and Reverence* (15:44)

Summary: “Religion” as a general category of human phenomena is a modern concept and is still evolving every day. But even as the definition of religion is debated, somehow the idea of “religion” is familiar to each of us, carrying with it a sense of inner recognition that is identified intuitively. In this lecture we touch on aspects of religion that help define how we experience “religion” in our lives.

Key Terms: Practice, Ritual, Transcendent, Immanent, Mythic, Narrative, Deity, Confirmation Bias, Theism

Story: Chochmach – the Blueprint of Creation

<http://www.theinterfaithobserver.org/journal-articles/2016/11/22/chochmah-the-blueprint-of-creation>

Story: The Chinese Jews of Kaifeng, and what I learned from them

<https://www.theinterfaithobserver.org/journal-articles/2022/12/1/the-chinese-kaifeng-jews>

Interview: Wisdom Literature and Creative Responses to Challenge (15.25)

<https://soundcloud.com/religica/diane-jacobson-wisdom-literature-and-creative-responses-to-challenge>

Reflect

Read the four passages from different religious texts found on this page and answer the following questions.

1. What features do you notice about references to an ultimate source or deity?
2. Is there a relationship to the universe that each passage assumes of the reader or listener?
3. Where do you recognize reverence and how does reverence appear in your ritual practices and/or in your beliefs?

Passage 1- Torah/Bible

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. And God said “Let there be light”; and there was light.” (Genesis 1:1-3, NRSV)

Passage 2- Rig Veda

There was neither existence nor non-existence then; there was neither the realm of space nor the sky which is beyond. What stirred? Where? In whose protection? Was there water, bottomlessly deep?

There was neither death nor immortality then. There was no distinguishing sign of night or of day. That One breathed, windless, by its own impulse. Other than That there was nothing beyond.

Darkness was hidden by darkness in the beginning; with no distinguishing sign, all this was water. The life force that was covered with emptiness, That One arose through the power of heat....

...the gods came afterwards, with the creation of this universe...

(Rig Veda 10:129, 1-3, 6, translated Wendy Doniger, The Rig Veda, Penguin Classics 1981)

Passage 3 - Tao Te Ching

Something unformed and complete,
Before heaven and earth were born,
Solitary and silent,
Stands alone and unchanging,
Pervading all things without limits,
It is like the mother of all under heaven,
But I don't know its name –

Better call it TAO.

Better call it Great.

TAO engenders One,
One engenders Two,
Two engenders Three,
Three engenders the ten thousand things.

(Tao te Ching, Ch. 25, 42, translated Stephen Adiss and Stanley Lombardo, Hackett Publishing, 1993)

Passage 4- Lakota Myth

In the time before motion, before anything had a meaning, there was only the Rock and the surrounding Darkness. The Rock had no beginning, for It was when nothing else was. Its form was soft and shapeless like a cloud; It had all powers and was everywhere. The Spirit of the Rock was Wakantanka, the Supreme Sacredness.

The Rock did not want to be alone, so It created out of Itself by putting forth Its power. Its power was in Its blood, which was blue. It opened Its veins and poured forth Its blue blood, and the vast disk of Earth covered with water was created. In creating, the Rock had used up Its power and became small and hard. But the Earth is really part of the Rock.

The powers of the Rock that could not live in the waters separated from the waters and became the blue dome of the sky. The Spirit of the Sky is Skan, who – unmoving – is the movement of everything that moves. Skan is the source of energy.

(Lakota creation story, compiled from: Marla N. Powers, Oglala Women, 1986, and James R. Walker, edited by Elaine A. Jahner, Lakota Myth, 1983)

Use a version of the grid below for individual, small group or full group reflection and discussion of the readings above.

	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Notes
Passage 1				
Passage 2				
Passage 3				
Passage 4				

Lesson 2.2. Lecture: *The Human Being—Four Relevant Questions* (18:01)

Summary: In this lecture, we move now to the domain of religious anthropology, where we will ask four relevant questions for any religious community. These are: First, “How are new humans welcomed?” Second, “What marks arrival at adulthood?” Third, “What happens when we die?” Fourth, “What is a human being?”

Key Terms: Community, Welcomed, Human Being, Ceremony, Rituals, Ceremonies, Naming Ceremony, Rites of Passage

Story: Worship and the Interreligious Family

<http://www.theinterfaithobserver.org/journal-articles/2014/2/15/worship-and-the-interreligious-family.html>

Interview: After the Fourth Prophecy – Finding a Way Back to Traditional Ways (13:46)

<https://soundcloud.com/religica/jim-dumont-after-the-fourth-prophecy-finding-a-way-back-to-traditional-ways>

Discussion Questions

Consider one religious community you've experienced or identify with when answering the following questions.

- What does this community say about what God or the Sacred is? Or what the human being is?
- What role does gender play in your own privilege or proximity to transcendence within this community?
- What does this community say happens to the human being after we die?
- What is the meaning of “human dignity” and how is it portrayed in this community’s worldview?

Supplemental Resources:

Video: Stories Bring the World Together (6:03)

https://seattleu.instructure.com/courses/1592222/pages/stories-bring-the-world-together?module_item_id=16980452

Article: They Found Faith in Interfaith Lives

<http://www.theinterfaithobserver.org/journal-articles/2017/1/9/they-found-faith-in-interfaith-lives>

Podcast: We Are All a Spark from God: Everything Else Happens Next (17:38)

<https://soundcloud.com/religica/karen-berg-we-are-all-a-spark-from-god-everything-else-happens-next>

Takeaways

- The practice of religious ritual allows us to experience time in new ways. Religious practice and activity predate our memory. They grow and change alongside us.
- Religions are organized when they provide community, practices, rituals, sacred texts, and belief.
- Religions are not all referring to the "same thing". Myths clarify purpose, order and coherence.
- Although religions agree that death is a life-limiting reality, some religious communities have numerous views of life and death.
- As we seek religious literacy, checking our biases at the door and resisting the temptation to engage in comparative analysis increases our openness and deepens our understanding.

Module 3: Religion and World – Boundaries, Violence, Response

In this Module we will look at what defines "authority" -- both generally and in religious traditions specifically -- how it shows up in various traditions and the purpose it serves. We will also explore the relationship between religion and violence, and the social responsibility that religion holds within society today.

Lesson 3.1. lecture: *Religious Authority – The Leader and the Text* (15:06)

Summary: In this lecture we will discuss authority, and the connection of authority to religion. We will begin by talking about authority in leadership, and then discuss authority and sacred text or scripture.

Key Terms: Authority, Leadership, Sacred Text, Religious Specialists

Story: The Man Behind the Way: Lao Tzu & Daoist Spirituality

<http://www.theinterfaithobserver.org/journal-articles/2018/5/10/the-man-behind-the-way-lao-tzu-daoist-spirituality>

Interview: After Loss, Violence is Never the Final Word at the Mosque in Christchurch (26:38)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AR5mczuAK3c>

Reflect:

- How does authority show up in your religions/spiritual tradition?
- To whom and/or what do you give authority?
- Do you think the way authority currently shows up should be augmented and if so, how and why?

Thinking specifically about sacred texts:

- What, from your perspective, gives a text sacred authority?
- How does a community decide whether a text provides true knowledge about what is morally upright practice?

Lesson 3.2 Lecture: *Religion, Violence, and Responsibility* (21:22)

Summary: The relationship between religion and violence is complex. As we discuss the relationship between religion and violence in this lecture, we will consider topics such as freedom of belief, fundamentalism, bigotry, power, and just war theory.

Key Terms: Violence, Freedom of Belief, Fundamentalism, Bigotry, Power, Just War Theory, Peacemaking

Story: Shrines to Brutality: The Relationship Between Sacred and Violence

<http://religica.org/shrines-to-brutality-the-relationship-between-sacred-and-violence/>

Story: So You Want to be an Interfaith Peacebuilder?

<http://www.theinterfaithobserver.org/journal-articles/2013/12/15/so-you-want-to-be-an-interfaith-peacebuilder.html>

Interview: Joy, Sorrow and Trauma (3:56)

<https://soundcloud.com/religica/joy-sorrow-and-trauma-diane-tomhave>

Discussion Question

Consider one religious community you've experienced or identify with when answering the following question: What does this community's specific response to violence (such as religious nationalism) tell you about their commitment to greater harmony in the world? Please explain.

Supplemental Resources:

Video: Break the Divide (7:06)

https://seattleu.instructure.com/courses/1592222/pages/break-the-divide?module_item_id=16981867

Article: The Fine Art of Interfaith Dialogue for World Peace

<http://www.theinterfaithobserver.org/journal-articles/2019/8/21/the-fine-art-of-interfaith-dialogue-for-world-peace>

Podcast: Arun Ghandi- On the Legacy of his grandfather – We Must Transform (13:53)

<https://soundcloud.com/religica/arun-gandhi-learning-from-grandfather-and-transforming-enemies-into-friends>

Takeaways:

- Authority shows up differently in every religion. What the different positions of authority are, and what they grant the individual authority over, is unique.
- Not all religious texts are sacred texts. Some texts have special authority in their community. These texts travel with communities through time, becoming "living documents." Considering how many billions have read and reread passages, and how their interpretations continue to shape and form society today, is important in the quest to understand religion.
- Religion's impact on the world is complex – it is not simply "good" or "bad." It has led to many wonderful and many terrible things and it is the responsibility of each of us, within our respective traditions, to help ensure it promotes goodness in the world.
- Religion provides many responses to when or how violence can be used to protect or defend against aggression.
- Religions often make the connection between internal health and the well-being of society, beginning with our inner lives first. This often extends to efforts to create positive change. Religions around the world provide robust resources for peacebuilding and addressing human need.

Module 4: Religion and Truth

In this Module we will explore the question "what kind of truth does a religious worldview contain?" by looking at truth sources for different religious traditions. We will also consider how we communicate truths as human beings, through beauty, art, prose, and action, both in individual and collective devotional practices.

Lesson 4.1. Lecture: Approaching Truth (17:18)

Summary: In this lecture we use sources considered to hold religious truths for various religious communities to explore two questions: 1) What kind of truth does a religious worldview contain? 2) Are there kinds of knowledge and truth that are distinctively "religious"?

Key Terms: Truth, Knowledge, Divination, Passage, Journey, Interpretation, Co-exist, Integrated

Story: Doctrine, Ritual and Spiritual Development

<http://www.theinterfaithobserver.org/journal-articles/2015/2/6/doctrine-ritual-and-spiritual-development.html>

Interview: A Respectful Conversation on Practice and Meditation (15:24)

<https://soundcloud.com/religica/dharma-master-hsin-tao-a-respectful-conversation-on-practice-and-meditation>

Reflect:

- How do you define truth? What forms of truth do you experience in your life?
- What are the sources of truth for the religion you affiliate with or the spiritual, or ethical belief system you hold? What about them makes them sources of truth for you?
- How do you make sense of the relationship between the various religious sources of truth mentioned in the lecture and the truths of ordinary experiences and natural sciences? Can they coexist and inform each other? If so, how?

Lesson 4.2 Lecture: Can you Hear me Now? Religion and Truth (9:51)

Summary: In this lecture, we explore how individuals respond to religious truths, considering a few examples including the creation and use of art and other objects and actions such as individual devotional practices, rituals of faith, formal instruction, and communal worship.

Key Terms: Devotional Practices, Icon, Devotional Objects, Symbols, Lifeway, Prayer, Ritual, Food, Drink

Story: Decolonizing Art

<http://www.theinterfaithobserver.org/journal-articles/2019/3/12/decolonizing-art?rq=decolonizing%20art>

Story: Living and Healing in Faith Communities

<http://religica.org/living-and-healing-in-faith-communities/>

Interview: Modern Colonialism, Personal Involvement in Solutions, and Rethinking Climate Change (12:00)

<https://soundcloud.com/religica/eriel-deranger-modern-colonialism-personal-involvement-in-solutions-rethinking-climate-change>

Discussion Questions:

- Have you attended a ceremony or ritual in your community or a celebration by friends or family that has special meaning for you or “sticks” with you? Please describe the ritual briefly and share what you learned or what touched you.
- How do you understand the relationship between religion and truth? Is this the primary role of religion, to show us something fundamentally true about the world around us?

Supplemental Resources:

Video: Being Transgender and a Person of Faith (5:05)

https://seattleu.instructure.com/courses/1592222/pages/being-transgender-and-a-person-of-faith?module_item_id=16917932

Article: What Do Women Bring to the Interfaith Table?

<http://www.theinterfaithobserver.org/journal-articles/2012/3/15/what-do-women-bring-to-the-interfaith-table.html>

Podcast: Leading from the Heart of the Historic Black Experience, Doris Cope (38:02)

<https://soundcloud.com/religica/rev-dr-doris-cope-leading-from-the-heart-of-the-historic-black-church-experience>

Takeaways

- Divination is the practice of foretelling the future or perception of hidden causes.
- Religious worldviews have a long history of testing messages received in visions (revelation) to verify and interpret their truth for the community.
- Icons are often venerated as conduits to the sacred and express the beauty of that relationship.
- Prayer is a dynamic concept that looks different across religions and can be done individually or in community.
- Religious literacy includes learning to approach different forms of prayer and worship with respect, as well as when and how to appropriately engage practices that are not your own.

Module 5: Religious Literacy Today

In this Module we will examine how "religion" has been changing recently and what this might mean for the future, focusing on "spirituality": what it means, its rise with the trend of disaffiliation from formally organized religion, and its relationship to religion. We'll also reflect on what we've learned throughout this course and how we can use our new knowledge to be an artful practitioner of interreligious engagement.

Lesson 5.1 Lecture: *Spirituality, Religion and the "Nones"* (12:04)

Summary: In this lecture we will take a further look at how "religion" has been changing recently, what this might mean for the future, and try to sort out the meaning of spirituality and its relation to religion.

Key Terms: Sacred, Disaffiliation, Spirituality, Nones, SBNR, Contemplative Practice, Religious Plurality, Interfaith Encounters, Interspirituality

Story: Recognizing the Secret Community

<http://www.theinterfaithobserver.org/journal-articles/2017/12/11/recognizing-the-secret-community>

Interview: Hope and Community Healing at Tree of Life Synagogue (17.11)

<https://soundcloud.com/religica/rabbi-jeffrey-myers-hope-community-healing-and-the-need-to-do-better>

Reflect:

In addition to your reflections on the lecture and the other materials above, you might consider reflecting on the specific case study here, or one pertinent to your context.

Why Religious Literacy Matters Case Study: The Hamline University Muhammad Controversy.

Click to read the following short articles and reflect on the questions below in your personal journal or another modality that you can easily refer to.

- 1) [Interfaith America explainer of the event Links to an external site.](#)
- 2) [Response in the Oracle Links to an external site.](#) (student newspaper)
- 3) [Responses from Interfaith America Staff LaTanya Lane](#)

- Jot down your initial thoughts about the controversy and the actions taken in response.
- What was done well and what could have been done better?
- What strategies do you think could have been used to facilitate deeper discussion and understanding among those involved?
- What steps can be taken to help prevent incidents like this one from happening again?

Lesson 5.2 Lecture: *Artful Practice* (8:02)

Summary: In this lecture we move from the study of religion (and religions) to interreligious engagement. We ask the question: "How can interreligious engagement be an artful endeavor?" and provide some recommendations.

Key Terms: Religious Literacy, Artful Practitioner, Interreligious Engagement, Respect, Lived Religion, Material Religion, Holy Envy

Story: Religious Literacy & the Flying Spaghetti Monster

<http://www.theinterfaithobserver.org/journal-articles/2022/12/3/religious-literacy-amp-the-flying-spaghetti-monster>

Story: Interreligious Literacy and Why it Matters

<http://www.theinterfaithobserver.org/journal-articles/2022/11/28/interreligious-literacy-and-why-it-matters>

Interview: Starting with Why at the Interfaith Center of New York (34:48)

<https://soundcloud.com/religica/rev-dr-chloe-breyer-podcast-starting-with-why-lead-by-raising-consciousness>

Interview: The Power of Music will Transform our World (29:57)

<https://soundcloud.com/religica/mack-wilberg-the-power-of-music-will-transform-our-world>

Discussion Questions:

- What are some reasons you think people choose not to affiliate (or to unaffiliate) with an organized religion?
- If you were (or are) a clergy person or teacher/leader in a particular organized religion, what are things you would try (individually or collectively with your members) to encourage people who are currently unaffiliated to attend your services or events?

Supplemental Resources:

Video and Reflection: Seeking Meaning from Many Intersecting Identities (7:42)

https://seattleu.instructure.com/courses/1592222/pages/seeking-meaning-from-many-intersecting-identities?module_item_id=16980529

Article: Engaging Faith Communities in Disasters

<https://www.theinterfaithobserver.org/journal-articles/2019/6/12/engaging-faith-communities-in-disasters>

Podcast: The Lived Experience of Forgiveness (36:07)

<https://soundcloud.com/religica/dr-steen-halling-the-lived-experience-of-forgiveness>

Takeaways:

- The way "spirituality" is used and understood has changed over time, but always includes both experiential and interior elements.
- Spirituality, a sense of "deep peace," and "wonder," is robustly on the rise among both the religious and the "nones," including agnostics and atheists.

- Artful practitioners of interreligious engagement try to internalize and use a rich skillset in order to engage meaningfully with people who do not see religions the same way.
- Advocates of the Material Religion approach assert that only by studying objects – things – can we fully understand what religion is.
- Religious literacy and becoming an artful practitioner of religious engagement has less to do with command of information and much more to do with a commitment to approach religious variety with an open heart and an open mind.

Leave-Taking: *Where We Go From Here*

It is important to mark the journey each individual has made, and the collective support given and received along the way. This ritual is offered, but facilitators should feel free to create a ritual that is meaningful for your group.

Reflect:

As you finish this course, we invite you to reflect on your takeaways. *Within your group, take a time of silence to let answers to the following prompts emerge:*

- What aspects of exploring religious literacy did you find most enriching? What was your most challenging learning?
- How will you continue to practice your religious literacy skills?

Each participant is then invited to share their response. Facilitators are free to explore any creative ways for sharing responses.

Take time to receive and offer gratitude for each person's journey into religious literacy and close your time with a blessing or prayer.

Survey

We value your feedback and encourage you to take the following Survey

<https://forms.office.com/r/2dS62pjwR2>

Additional Resources

*The resources listed here are for further exploration of the material presented in the modules. Some are general resources and others are mentioned in the modules. It is **not** necessary that you procure these materials to complete the course.*

General Resource

AAR Religious Literacy Guidelines

<https://aarweb.org/AARMBR/AARMBR/Publications-and-News-/Guides-and-Best-Practices-/Teaching-and-Learning-/AAR-Religious-Literacy-Guidelines.aspx>

González, Justo L. *Essential Theological Terms*. 1st ed. Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005.

Smith, Huston. *The Illustrated World's Religions : A Guide to Our Wisdom Traditions*. First Harper Collins paperback edition. New York, NY: Harper San Francisco, an imprint of Harper Collins Publishers, 1995.

Smith, Jonathan Z. *The HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion*. Ed. by William Scott Green and Jorunn Jacobsen Buckley. First edition. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1995.

Module 1

Ahmed, Shahab. *What Is Islam? : The Importance of Being Islamic*. Princeton ; Princeton University Press, 2016.

Earhart, H. Byron, ed. *Religious Traditions of the World : A Journey through Africa, Mesoamerica, North America, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, China, and Japan*. First edition. San Francisco, California: Harper San Francisco, 1993.

Smart, Ninian. *Dimensions of the Sacred : An Anatomy of the World's Beliefs*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

Module 2

Haught, John F. *What Is Religion? : An Introduction*. New York: Paulist Press, 1990.

Module 3

Appleby, R. Scott. *Religious Fundamentalisms and Global Conflict*. Ithaca, N.Y: Foreign Policy Association, 1994.

Hedges, Paul Michael. *Understanding Religion: Theories and Methods for Studying Religiously Diverse Societies*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2021.

Kimball, Charles. *When Religion Becomes Evil*. 1st ed. San Francisco, Calif: Harper San Francisco, 2002.

Kimball, Charles. *When Religion Becomes Lethal: The Explosive Mix of Politics and Religion in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. First edition. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2011.

Mikva, Rachel S. *Dangerous Religious Ideas: The Deep Roots of Self-Critical Faith in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2021

Omar, Irfan A., and Michael K. Duffey, eds. *Peacemaking and the Challenge of Violence in World Religions*. Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2015.

Sterns, Jessica. *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill*. New York: Ecco, 2003.

Swami Vivekananda, 1893 speech to *World's Parliament of Religion*
<https://www.artic.edu/swami-vivekananda-and-his-1893-speech>

Thistlethwaite, Susan Brooks. *Interfaith Just Peacemaking: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives on the New Paradigm of Peace and War*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Module 4

Archie Fire Lame Deere and Richard Erdoes. *Gift of Power: The Life and Teachings of a Lakota Medicine Man*. Rochester, VT: Bear & Company, 1992.

Neihardt, John G. *Black Elk Speaks*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Presse, 1961.

Module 5

Fuller, Robert C. *Spiritual, but Not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America*. Oxford ; Oxford University Press, 2001.

Otto, Rudolf. *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*. Trans. by John W. (John Wilfred) Harvey. New York: Oxford University Press, 1958.

Sheldrake, Philip. *Spirituality: A Very Short Introduction*. First edition. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Centering Prayers and Readings

This collection of readings from unique religious and wisdom traditions provides an opportunity to bring diverse voices and ideas into your gatherings. Engage them with openness to the wisdom and insight they offer.

Eternal God, Creator of the universe, there is no God but You.
Great and wonderful are Your works, wondrous are your ways.
Thank You for the many-splendored variety of Your creation.
Thank You for the many ways we affirm Your presence and purpose,
and the freedom to do so.
Forgive our violation of Your creation.
Forgive our violence toward each other.
We stand in awe and gratitude for Your persistent love
for each and all of Your children:
Christian, Jew, Muslim,
as well as those with other faiths.
Grant to all, and our leaders, attributes of the strong;
mutual respect in words and deed,
restraint in the exercise of power,
and the will for peace with justice, for all.
Eternal God, Creator of the universe, there is no God but You. Amen.

Reprinted from the World Council of Churches website [HERE](#)

Eternal God,
you have called us to ventures
of which we cannot see the ending,
by paths as yet untrodden,
through perils unknown.
Give us faith to go out with good courage,
not knowing where we go,
but only that your hand is leading us
and your love supporting us;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen
Reprinted from

The Book of Common Worship,
Westminster John Knox Press, 1993.

I offer you peace.
I offer you love.
I offer you friendship.
I see your beauty.
I hear your need.
I feel your feelings.
My wisdom flows from the highest Source.
I salute that Source in you.
Let us work together. For unity and peace.”

Mahatma Gandhi

Do not be satisfied until each one
With whom you are concerned
is to you like a member of your family.
Regard each one either as a father, a brother,
Or as a sister, a mother, or a child.
If you can attain to this,
Your difficulties will vanish.
You will know what to do.
'ABdu'l-Baha, Bah'ai

The thought manifests as the word;
The word manifests as the deed;
The deed develops into habit;
And habit hardens into character.
So, watch the thought and its ways with care,
And let it spring from love
Born out of concern for all beings.
The Buddha

Source of life and love, we pray for peace in our
world. We seek peace in our hearts, a peace
that transcends all understanding, that heals all
wounds, that reconciles all conflicts. Grant us
the wisdom to seek peace, to pursue dialogue,
to embrace diversity, to respect dignity, and to
uphold justice.

May we be blessed with peace, a peace that is a
gift and a responsibility, that is a promise and a
challenge, that is a hope and a reality.

And let us say, Amen.

Interfaith Families Project
<https://iffp.org/2023/10/11/prayer-for-peace/>

Lord of All,
We stand in awe before you,
Impelled by the visions of the harmony of all
people.
We are children of many traditions,
Inheritors of shared wisdom and tragic
misunderstandings,
Of proud hopes and humble successes.
Now it is time for us to meet
In memory and truth,
In courage and trust,
In love and promise.
Jewish prayer

Grandfather Great Spirit
All over the world the faces of living ones are
alike.
With tenderness they have come up out of
the ground
Look upon your children that they may face
the winds
And walk the good road to the Day of Quiet.
Grandfather Great Spirit
Fill us with the Light.
Give us the strength to understand, and the
eyes to see.
Teach us to walk the soft Earth as relatives to
all that live.
- Sioux Prayer

May the atmosphere we breathe
breathe fearlessness into us:
Fearlessness on earth
and fearlessness in heaven!
May fearlessness guard us
behind and before!
May fearlessness surround us
above and below!
May we be without fear
of friend and foe!
May we be without fear
by night and by day!
Let all the world be my friends!
Atharva Veda XIX, 15

PARTICIPANT RESOURCES

Student Participation and Engagement

Discussion and reflection are central to this course. Productive discussions will result from engaging with your fellow participants' ideas as well as with the material you've gone through in the module. Below are some suggestions for creating enriching discussions.

- Take time to reflect before you respond and respond thoughtfully.
- Respond to one another's sharing and invite further discussion:
 - Propose a new idea for feedback.
 - Ask for clarification or further explanation about an aspect of the question you had trouble answering.
 - Ask your peers to make a connection between the topic and another piece of literature, movie, or something they have personally experienced.
 - Invite your peers to imagine a different conclusion or share another perspective.
 - If you presented an opinion or idea about the given topic that was not addressed in the question, ask your peers to respond to it.
 - Pose a follow-up question to the group to expand the conversation or shift it in a new direction.
 - Present a controversial idea or statement and ask peers if they agree or disagree with the statement.
 - Encourage peers to ask questions about the points you made if anything was confusing or unclear.

What is Religious Literacy?

Throughout the course your understanding of religious literacy may grow and shift. Use the grid below – individually and collectively- to explore your growing understanding of the facets of religious literacy.

Religious literacy is the ability to discern and analyze the role of religion in personal, social, political, professional, and cultural life. Nurturing this capacity helps us to understand our neighbors with more empathy and engage one another with intelligence and insightfulness.

<i>personal</i>	
<i>social</i>	
<i>political</i>	
<i>professional</i>	
<i>cultural</i>	

LINKS TO ONLINE RESOURCES

These pages may be copied and/or sent to participants. You can choose which links to share with participants.

Module 1 Lessons

Story: Am I a Bad Muslim? <http://religica.org/am-i-a-bad-muslim/>

Podcast: A Life Dedication to Global Interfaith Work & Impact (13:50)

<https://soundcloud.com/religica/swami-chidanand-saraswati-a-life-dedication-to-global-interfaith-work-impact>

Story: Starting with Moksha and Karma Yoga

<http://www.theinterfaithobserver.org/journal-articles/2012/1/13/starting-with-moksha-and-karma-yoga.html>

Story: My Dad Didn't Like Religion, but He Prepared Me for Religious Diversity

<http://www.theinterfaithobserver.org/journal-articles/2019/1/8/my-dad-didnt-like-religion-but-he-prepared-me-for-religious-diversity>

Podcast: Finding a Way: 30 Years of Buddhist Nuns Stepping Up in the World (17:55)

<https://soundcloud.com/religica/karma-lekshe-tsomo-finding-a-way-30-years-of-buddhist-nuns-stepping-up-in-the-world>

Supplemental Resources

Video: What are you Seeking? (6:53)

https://seattleu.instructure.com/courses/1592222/pages/what-are-you-seeking?module_item_id=16983257

Article: Storytelling – It's Not Just for Grown-Ups

<http://www.theinterfaithobserver.org/journal-articles/2015/9/3/storytelling-its-not-just-for-grown-ups.html>

Podcast: Melting the Ice in Our Hearts and Understanding Our Inner Depth (15:36)

<https://soundcloud.com/religica/angaangaq-uncle-angakkorsuaq-melting-the-ice-in-our-hearts-understanding-our-inner-depth>

Module 2 Lessons

Story: Chochmach – the Blueprint of Creation

<http://www.theinterfaithobserver.org/journal-articles/2016/11/22/chochmah-the-blueprint-of-creation>

Story: The Chinese Jews of Kaifeng, and what I learned from them

<https://www.theinterfaithobserver.org/journal-articles/2022/12/1/the-chinese-kaifeng-jews>

Interview: Wisdom Literature and Creative Responses to Challenge

<https://soundcloud.com/religica/diane-jacobson-wisdom-literature-and-creative-responses-to-challenge>

Story: Worship and the Interreligious Family

<http://www.theinterfaithobserver.org/journal-articles/2014/2/15/worship-and-the-interreligious-family.html>

Interview: After the Fourth Prophecy – Finding a Way Back to Traditional Ways

<https://soundcloud.com/religica/jim-dumont-after-the-fourth-prophecy-finding-a-way-back-to-traditional-ways>

Supplemental Resources

Video: Stories Bring the World Together

https://seattleu.instructure.com/courses/1592222/pages/stories-bring-the-world-together?module_item_id=16980452

Article: They Found Faith in Interfaith Lives

<http://www.theinterfaithobserver.org/journal-articles/2017/1/9/they-found-faith-in-interfaith-lives>

Podcast: We Are All a Spark from God: Everything Else Happens Next

<https://soundcloud.com/religica/karen-berg-we-are-all-a-spark-from-god-everything-else-happens-next>

Module 3 Lessons

Story: The Man Behind the Way: Lao Tzu & Daoist Spirituality

<http://www.theinterfaithobserver.org/journal-articles/2018/5/10/the-man-behind-the-way-lao-tzu-daoist-spirituality>

Interview: After Loss, Violence is Never the Final Word at the Mosque in Christchurch

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AR5mczuAK3c>

Story: Shrines to Brutality: The Relationship Between Sacred and Violence

<http://religica.org/shrines-to-brutality-the-relationship-between-sacred-and-violence/>

Story: So You Want to be an Interfaith Peacebuilder?

<http://www.theinterfaithobserver.org/journal-articles/2013/12/15/so-you-want-to-be-an-interfaith-peacebuilder.html>

Interview: Joy, Sorrow and Trauma

<https://soundcloud.com/religica/joy-sorrow-and-trauma-diane-tomhave>

Supplemental Resources

Video: Break the Divide

https://seattleu.instructure.com/courses/1592222/pages/break-the-divide?module_item_id=16981867

Article: The Fine Art of Interfaith Dialogue for World Peace

<http://www.theinterfaithobserver.org/journal-articles/2019/8/21/the-fine-art-of-interfaith-dialogue-for-world-peace>

Podcast: Arun Ghandi- On the Legacy of his grandfather – We Must Transform (13:53)
<https://soundcloud.com/religica/arun-gandhi-learning-from-grandfather-and-transforming-enemies-into-friends>

Module 4 Lessons

Story: Doctrine, Ritual and Spiritual Development
<http://www.theinterfaithobserver.org/journal-articles/2015/2/6/doctrine-ritual-and-spiritual-development.html>

Interview: A Respectful Conversation on Practice and Meditation (15:24)
<https://soundcloud.com/religica/dharma-master-hsin-tao-a-respectful-conversation-on-practice-and-meditation>

Story: Decolonizing Art
<http://www.theinterfaithobserver.org/journal-articles/2019/3/12/decolonizing-art?rq=decolonizing%20art>

Story: Living and Healing in Faith Communities
<http://religica.org/living-and-healing-in-faith-communities/>

Interview: Modern Colonialism, Personal Involvement in Solutions, and Rethinking Climate Change (12:00)
<https://soundcloud.com/religica/eriel-deranger-modern-colonialism-personal-involvement-in-solutions-rethinking-climate-change>

Supplemental Resources

Video: Being transgender and a Person of Faith (5:05)
https://seattleu.instructure.com/courses/1592222/pages/being-transgender-and-a-person-of-faith?module_item_id=16917932

Article: What Do Women Bring to the Interfaith Table?
<http://www.theinterfaithobserver.org/journal-articles/2012/3/15/what-do-women-bring-to-the-interfaith-table.html>

Podcast: Leading from the Heart of the Historic Black Experience, Doris Cope (38:02)
<https://soundcloud.com/religica/rev-dr-doris-cope-leading-from-the-heart-of-the-historic-black-church-experience>

Module 5 Lessons

Story: Recognizing the Secret Community
<http://www.theinterfaithobserver.org/journal-articles/2017/12/11/recognizing-the-secret-community>

Interview: Hope and Community Healing at Tree of Life Synagogue
<https://soundcloud.com/religica/rabbi-jeffrey-myers-hope-community-healing-and-the-need-to-do-better>

Story: Religious Literacy & the Flying Spaghetti Monster

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Interview: The Power of Music will Transform our World

<https://soundcloud.com/religica/mack-wilberg-the-power-of-music-will-transform-our-world>

Supplemental Resources

Video and Reflection: Seeking Meaning from Many Intersecting Identities

https://seattleu.instructure.com/courses/1592222/pages/seeking-meaning-from-many-intersecting-identities?module_item_id=16980529

Article: Engaging Faith Communities in Disasters

<https://www.theinterfaithobserver.org/journal-articles/2019/6/12/engaging-faith-communities-in-disasters>

Podcast: The Lived Experience of Forgiveness (36:07)

<https://soundcloud.com/religica/dr-steen-halling-the-lived-experience-of-forgiveness>

[illegible]

Thank you to our curriculum development team for this resource:

Kara Markell, Protestant

Marcia Riggers, Protestant

Elise DeGooyer, Catholic

Luke Lavin, Catholic

Mahrukh Motafram, Zoroastrian

Hannah Hochkeppel, Episcopal

Tandi Rogers, Unitarian Universalist

Kate Speizer, Jewish

Please explore these additional offerings from CEIE

Gratitude Injury and Repair in a Pandemic Age

<https://seattleupce.instructure.com/courses/1235>

This free resource is an accompaniment to the book of the same title published by Georgetown University Press (2024). It includes excerpts from the book, conversations with authors and reflection questions.

Inner Development Goals and Addressing Global Challenges

<https://seattleupce.instructure.com/courses/1258>

This free resource provides you opportunities to reflect on learnings from the Covid-19 global health emergency and the features of a Pandemic Age. In addition, it asks you to consider new work being carried out through the Inner Development Goals that addresses societal challenges around the world today.

The resource includes conversations, resources, spiritual practices and a study guide for exploring and embodying the Inner Development Goals.

Faith for Earth: A Call for Action

<https://seattleu.instructure.com/courses/1600549>

This resource is a supplementary guide to *Faith for Earth: A Call for Action*, created through the Parliament of the World's Religions and the United Nations Environmental Program, Faith for Earth Initiative.

Seeking Wisdom Series

<https://seattleu.instructure.com/courses/1592222>

The Seeking Wisdom Series is committed to helping leaders deepen their awareness of the wisdom they have and can share. Through every discipline, people are formed to be leaders within their communities every day. This resource is committed to the greater good of education.