MA in Religious Studies with Language: Indo-Tibetan Buddhism

The 61-credit MA Religious Studies with Language program with the Indo-Tibetan Buddhism concentration offers two emphases: History of Religions and Tibetan Tradition. This MA degree includes all the course work of the MA Religious Studies degree with the Indo-Tibetan Buddhism concentration, which is enriched by training in either Sanskrit or Tibetan through two years (16 credits) of course work or more. This degree surveys Indian and Tibetan Buddhism with emphasis on textual and meditative lineages, integrating study and practice each semester, with the added dimension of exploring Buddhist texts beyond the filter of a particular English translation through language study. The faculty includes Western-trained academics and acharyas (master teachers) steeped in Tibetan Buddhist practice as well as English-speaking Tibetan lamas extensively trained in their own traditions.

Sanskrit

As the classical language of South Asia, Sanskrit is the lingua franca of Buddhist and Hindu religious traditions throughout Asia. The Sanskrit language option provides students with a knowledge of Sanskrit grammar and vocabulary, as well as initial reading knowledge, providing access to the world of Buddhist and Hindu texts.

Tibetan

Study of the Tibetan language provides access to the rich and diverse world of Tibetan Buddhist literature, to the oral teachings of contemporary Tibetan masters, and to a great body of Indian texts that survive only in Tibetan translation. The Tibetan language option provides training in both classical Tibetan and the spoken language. Study of classic Tibetan involves learning grammar and vocabulary of the classical language and the reading of texts. Modern Tibetan is learned through the study of the contemporary idiom with practice in hearing and speaking Tibetan.

Two Emphases: History of Religions or Tibetan Tradition

For their second academic year, students choose either the History of Religions or Tibetan Tradition emphasis.

History of Religions Emphasis

The History of Religions emphasis has been developed by Naropa’s core faculty over the past twenty-five years and investigates the Buddhist tradition in light of its many dimensions in culture: textual, historical, artistic, and meditative. “History of Religions” refers to academic study that values religion, in this case Buddhism, as an expression of cultures over time, manifesting in literature, the arts, social institutions, traditions of saints, ethics and philosophy, and myth and symbol. While History of Religions introduces critical methods of contemporary scholarship, such as textual analysis and phenomenology, at the forefront is the exploration of the richness of religious imagination and practice.

Tibetan Tradition Emphasis

In the Tibetan Tradition emphasis, students acquire the systematic foundation in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism that students receive in a traditional Tibetan monastic college (shedra), utilizing a blend of traditional and Western styles of pedagogy, based on the materials, teaching methods, and forms of analytical meditation developed at Nitartha Institute since its founding in 1996 by Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche. Presenting all Three Turnings of the Wheel of Dharma, these courses emphasize the union of view, meditation and conduct, and utilize elements of the History of Religions methods described above. (For background information, see www.nitarthainstitute.org.)

The course of study of the Tibetan Tradition emphasis includes attending a monthlong summer program of Nitartha Institute between the first and second years of the degree program.

Tibetan Language Teacher Training Program

Each year, a top student is chosen from the third year Tibetan language students to help a faculty member teach Tibetan I and II. The student must be concurrently enrolled in Tibetan V and VI.

Tibetan Apprenticeships

Students who have excelled in two semesters of Tibetan may apply for a research assistant position with the Tsadra Foundation Research Center in Boulder. If applicants also have studied Sanskrit, that is a plus, but not required. Students who have completed at least four Tibetan courses are eligible to apply to the Nalanda Translation Committee Apprenticeship program, which provides funding for a year (or more) for further Tibetan language training with the translation committee after they graduate.

Culminating Requirements

The degree program concludes with an oral comprehensive exam as well as a master’s paper or project which can include a translation of Sanskrit or Tibetan.

Degree Requirements

MA in Religious Studies with Language: Indo-Tibetan Buddhism

First year, fall

- REL503 Tibetan I (4) or REL507 Sanskrit I (4)
- REL600 Meditation Practicum I: Seeds of Peace (3)
- REL611 The First Turning of the Wheel: Nature of Mind and Emotions (3)
- REL614 Mind and Its World I (3)

SUBTOTAL 13

First year, spring

- REL533 Tibetan II (4) or

SUBTOTAL 13
REL537 Sanskrit II (4)
• REL620 Meditation Practicum II: Self and No-Self (3)
• REL624 Mind and Its World II (3)
• REL650 Buddhist Meditation Intensive (noncredit)*
• REL661 The Second Turning of the Wheel: The Bodhisattva Path (3)

Religious Studies elective (3)

SUBTOTAL 16

First year, summer
Tibetan Tradition emphasis students will attend Nitartha Institute **

• REL705 The Mind Only School (1.5) Tibetan Tradition emphasis only
• REL720 Buddha Nature and Shentong Traditions (1.5) Tibetan Tradition emphasis only

SUBTOTAL 3 (Tibetan Tradition emphasis)

Second year, fall

• REL553 Tibetan III (4) or REL557 Sanskrit III (4)
• REL635 Meditation Practicum III: Mind-Training (3)
• REL645 Methods and Issues in the Study of Religion (3)
• REL701 The Middle Way School (3)

Religious Studies elective (3)

SUBTOTAL 16

Second year, spring

• REL583 Tibetan IV (4) or REL587 Sanskrit IV (4)
• REL710 The Third Turning of the Wheel (3)
• REL751 Buddhism in Tibet (3) or REL760 Vajrayana: Symbol, Iconography and Ritual (3)
• REL780 Meditation Practicum IV: Maitri and Mandala (3)

Religious Studies elective (3) History of Religions emphasis only

• REL880 Comprehensive Exam (noncredit)
• REL885 MA/MDiv Final Project (noncredit)

SUBTOTAL 13 (16 History of Religions emphasis)

TOTAL CREDITS 61

* It is highly recommended that students complete the noncredit monthlong Buddhist Meditation Intensive requirement (REL650) by the winter break between the fall and spring semesters of their first year, or at the latest during the summer following their first year.

** Students are required to complete the requirement of attending a monthlong Nitartha Institute program in the summer following their first year. This is integral to sequence of the curriculum.

Religious Studies Electives

Buddhism Electives

• REL540 Zen Buddhism (3)
• REL546 Buddhism in America: Dharma Comes West (3)
• REL751 Buddhism in Tibet (3)
• REL760 Vajrayana: Symbol, Iconography and Ritual (3)

General Electives

• REL525 Contemplative Christianity (3)
• REL529 Foundations of Judaism: Torah, Prayer, and Acts of Kindness (3)
• REL530 Contemplative Hinduism (3)
• REL535 Introduction to Jewish Mysticism (3)
• REL545 Contemplative Islam (3)
• REL585 Spiritual Models of Social Action (3)
• REL623 Religious Experience in Africa: Sacred Cosmos, Ritual, and Community (3)
• REL625 Prayer and Prophecy: Biblical Literatures (3)
• REL634 Hindu Yoga-Tantra (3)
• REL655 Trends in Religious Studies (3)
• REL672 Non-Dualism in Theory and Practice (3)
• REL675 Inner Oral Tradition of the Torah (3)
• REL749 Contemporary American Religion (3)
• REL779 Interreligious Dialogue: Theory and Practice (3)

Contemplative Practice Electives

• REL504W The Breeze of Simplicity: Meditation Weekend (1)
• REL540 Zen Buddhism (3)
• REL554W Opening the Heart: Meditation Weekend (1)
• REL571 Centering Prayer as Christian Contemplation (3)
• REL609W Mindfulness Instructor Training I (1)*
• REL690W–791W Shambhala Training Levels I–XII (1)
  • REL690W Shambhala Training Level I: The Art of Being Human (1)
  • REL691W Shambhala Training Level II: Birth of the Warrior (1)
  • REL692W Shambhala Training Level III: Warrior in the World (1)
  • REL693W Shambhala Training Level IV: Awakened Heart (1)
  • REL694W Shambhala Training Level V: Open Sky (1)
  • REL695W Shambhala Training Level VI: Great Eastern Sun (1)
  • REL790W Shambhala Training Level VII: Windhorse (1)
  • REL791W Shambhala Training Level VIII: Drala (1)
  • REL792W Shambhala Training Level IX: Meek/Perky (1)
  • REL793W Shambhala Training Level X: Perky (1)
  • REL794W Shambhala Training Level XI: Outrageous & Inscrutable (1)
  • REL795W Shambhala Training Level XII: Golden Key (1)
• REL709W Mindfulness Instructor Training II (1)*
• REL809W Mindfulness Instructor Training III (1)*

* These courses must be taken in sequence. The prerequisites for REL609W are Meditation Practicum I and II, as well as a Buddhist
monthlong meditation intensive, two weeks of which must be completed before the class begins.

Course Listings

**REL501W**
Theravada Vipassana: Weekend (1)
When mindfulness meditation is practiced, the exquisite ordinariness of the movement of breath, of the sensation of the body sitting on the earth and of the busyness of the mind and emotions is discovered. This intensive weekend introduces insight meditation, "vipassana," from the Theravada Buddhist tradition of Southeast Asia. This course will include mindfulness practice in sitting, walking and daily life through short talks, guided meditations and the practice of "noble silence." Cross-listed as REL157W.

**REL503**
Tibetan I (4)
This class develops a foundation in literary Tibetan and begins the study of modern spoken Tibetan. The first semester focuses on the grammatical foundation of the language, the acquisition of basic vocabulary and training in the skills of correct pronunciation, handwriting and spelling. Students should expect to study at least eight hours a week outside of class. Cross-listed as REL274.

**REL503C**
Tibetan I (4)

**REL504W**
Breeze of Simplicity: Meditation Weekend (1)
This course introduces spiritual practices, meditation, and various themes from specific spiritual traditions. The spiritual tradition will vary depending on the visiting instructor presenting. Beginning or experienced students are welcome and guided through the presentations. The weekend includes lectures, discussion, meditation, and/or other spiritual practices. Cross-listed as REL158W.

**REL525**
Contemplative Christianity (3)
This course examines the contemplative and mystical tradition of Christianity and its recent recovery by mainstream Christians through the work of Thomas Merton and others. Students will examine contemplative perspectives on such major topics as God, Christ, salvation, divine union, deification, scripture and spiritual evolution, especially as these views contrast with modern fundamentalism. This class will also study the contributions of the major historical writers of the tradition. The class includes ample time for contemplative practice. Cross-listed as REL325.

**REL527E**
Buddha Nature: The Nature of Enlightenment in Uttaratantra and Mahamudra (3)
One of Buddhism’s most important teachings is the doctrine of tathagatagarbha, or buddha nature, which proclaims the natural enlightenment of all beings, and the importance of uncovering this already present enlightenment through penetrating insight and meditation practice. The philosophy propounded in the Uttaratantra underlies the teachings of the Mahamudra tradition, one of the most profound Buddhist lineages of practice and accomplishment. This course examines the relationship of these two traditions through a close study of a landmark treatise by Gö Lotsawa (1392-1481 A.D.) and provides a rare opportunity to study the basis of the Mahamudra teachings in the Buddhist sutra tradition. Prerequisite: Several courses in Buddhist studies.

**REL529**
Foundations of Judaism (3)
This course traces the evolution of rabbinic Judaism in its history, beliefs, literature and practices. Beginning with its formation in the first century of the Common Era, we follow major developments through the Middle Ages and into the modern period. Along the way, we learn about the Jewish conception of Torah in both its metaphysical and practical elements. We study material from the foundational texts of the Oral Torah: Mishnah, Gemara and Midrash, as well as later texts. Jewish law, philosophy, Kabbalah, sacred time and contemplative prayer are studied and discussed. Cross-listed as REL229.

**REL530**
Contemplative Hinduism (3)
An experiential and philosophical introduction to the scriptures and spiritual practices of Hindu traditions with emphasis on the Vedas, early Tantra and the yoga sutras of Patanjali. A portion of each class is devoted to practice: meditation, pranayama, mantra and ritual. Offered alternate years. Cross-listed as REL330.

**REL532E**
Buddhism: The Way of Wisdom and Compassion (3)
Providing a basic introduction to the ideas, perspectives, and practices of Buddhism, this course looks at the life and cultural context of Buddha Shakyamuni, founder of Buddhism. Students then examine the core teachings of Buddhism as found in the four noble truths. Discussions include a reflection on the importance of
recognizing suffering as the first step on the spiritual path; the role of karma in human bondage and liberation; the reality of a state beyond the chaos and confusion of the human condition; and the effectiveness of the Buddhist path based on ethical behavior and meditation.

REL533
Tibetan II (4)
A continuation of Tibetan I. The second semester will continue the work begun in Tibetan I with the addition of working on an actual Tibetan text. Students use a mandala approach of developing varied oral, aural and written skills to produce an overall knowledge of the language. Prerequisite: REL503. Cross-listed as REL289.

REL535
Introduction to Jewish Mysticism (3)
The course focuses on three major trends in the history of Jewish mysticism: Spanish Kabbalah, the School of Isaac Luria, and East European Hasidism. Topics include theosophy and theurgy, ecstatic and contemplative prayer, mystical psychology, soul transmigration, and esoteric interpretation of scripture. The course provides a basic kabbalistic vocabulary and introduction to primary mystical sources that prepare a student for further study of contemplative Judaism. Prerequisite REL529. Cross-listed as REL321.

REL536E
Buddhist Teachings on Mind and Emotions: The Abhidharma Tradition (3)
Tracing the Buddha’s early discoveries about mind and emotion, this course follows the pedagogy of meditative investigation. The curriculum, called the Abhidharma, the school of refined investigation, follows the Abhidharma sources of several Buddhist traditions, especially those foundational to Vipassana meditation of the Theravada school and Shamatha-vipashyana meditation of Tibetan Buddhism. The course integrates elements from traditional monastic training adapted to a contemporary setting: weekly memorization of a passage of scripture, guided contemplations, and the reading of Buddhist scripture in translation. Relevant parallels with contemporary psychology and cognitive science are also indicated.

REL537
Sanskrit II (4)
This course is a continuation of Sanskrit I. Prerequisite: REL507. Cross-listed as REL287.

REL540
Zen Buddhism (3)
Taking the path of Zen is for the purpose of bringing about a profound transformation at the core of one’s being, enabling one to live with greater selflessness and affection for the benefit of all that breathes and does not breathe. The course includes instruction in zazen (the cornerstone meditation practice of Zen), periods of sitting zazen, instructions on applying mindfulness to one’s daily life, as well as studying the classic texts and teachings of the tradition. The course may include all-day sitting at one of the Zen centers in the Denver area.

REL543E
Classical Jewish Mysticism (3)
This course outlines the major trends of the Jewish mystical tradition, ranging from the biblical period until the teachings of Isaac Luria in the 16th century. The history and contemplative approach of the Hekhalot/Mekavah School, Abraham Abulafia, the Zohar School, and Isaac Luria are covered. Topics include theosophy and theurgy, ecstatic and contemplative prayer, mystical psychology, soul transmigration, and esoteric interpretation of scripture. The course provides a basic kabbalistic vocabulary and introduction to primary mystical sources that prepares the student for further study of contemplative Judaism. Throughout the course, attention is paid to the experiential dimension of the teachings. Co-requisite: REL529 or equivalent.

REL545
Contemplative Islam (3)
An introduction to the belief system and cultures of the Islamic world via an interactive approach. Emphasis will be placed on the traditional values, beliefs and prescribed practices of the Islamic world as expounded in the key authoritative Islamic sources: the Qur’an and the Sunna of the prophet Muhammad. A central theme that will be examined is the doctrine of tawhid, or the unity of God, which underlies all Islamic thought and belief. Students will participate in a variety of Islamic rituals and practices in order to gain a firsthand experience of Islam. Offered alternative years.

REL546
Buddhism in America: Dharma Comes West (3)
This course surveys the variety of ways in which Buddhism continues to influence contemporary American culture, and in turn be influenced by it. In particular, we explore the ways in which Buddhism has changed and adapted in the different American Buddhist communities. Our scope includes spirituality and religion, literature, social activism, pluralism and dialogue. Student projects focus on specific Buddhist communities that have joined facets of Buddhist and American culture. Grading criteria includes short writing assignments, final exam and term paper. Cross-listed as REL348.

REL547
Contemplative Practice Intensive (1.5)
The purpose of this intensive is to give students the opportunity to deepen their discipline and knowledge of their own spiritual tradition in a community setting that offers a prescribed schedule of practice and of service. Graduate students may choose to do a program ranging in length from 1 week to a maximum of 4 weeks at a retreat center of their choice. The center or organization must be approved by the Religious Studies program. Some examples of these sites are Tibetan Buddhist meditation centers, Shambhala Retreat Centers, Zen Centers, Christian monasteries, Ashrams, and Jewish Contemplative retreats. Others choices are possible with the approval of the program. It is advisable to check with the
Contemplative Practice Coordinator to make sure that your choice of retreat center can be approved. This course is not available to Religious Studies graduate students. Cross-listed as REL258.

**REL552W**  
Zen Intensive Weekend (1)  
The teaching and practice of Zen Buddhism assumes that there is a Big Mind present in all mental and physical activities, that this Big Mind can be realized and that its realization can be matured. The class looks at how this Zen paradigm-its teachings, practices and realization-can be a personal vision and part of professional contemporary psychology. Cross-listed as REL156W.

**REL553**  
Tibetan III (4)  
This course continues to expand student knowledge of the grammar and vocabulary of literary Tibetan primarily through translating texts in different genres such as sutras, lives of Buddhist saints, history, philosophy and so forth. It also continues to develop student knowledge of spoken Tibetan. Prerequisite: REL533. Cross-listed as REL375.

**REL554W**  
Opening the Heart (1)  
This course introduces spiritual practices, meditation, and various themes from specific spiritual traditions. The spiritual tradition will vary depending on the visiting instructor presenting. When the vast network of pain and confusion in the world is experienced, one can become overwhelmed and full of despair. This weekend provides tools that allow one to work with this in order to discover compassion and the courageous heart available to everyone. Cross-listed as REL554W.

**REL557**  
Sanskrit III (4)  
A continuation into the second year of basic Sanskrit grammar, pronunciation, dictionary usage, and vocabulary acquisition. There will be strong emphasis on noun compounds (samaasas). We will move onwards through the Goldman and Goldman primer, Devavanipraveshika. We will read selectively in a range of texts, including Hindu & Buddhist scripture, and secular court poetry. Stanzas from Bhagavad-gita will be introduced, as well as the Heart Sutra. Particular attention will be given in class to Indic culture, its connection to Sanskrit language & religious traditions, and issues raised by the work of translation. Prerequisite: REL537. Cross-listed as REL377.

**REL561E**  
Hasidism: Movement, Masters, Teaching (3)  
This course explores the history and contemplative approach of Eastern European Hasidism, the mystical/ pietistic revival movement that formed in southeastern Poland in the 18th century. Topics include contemplative prayer, mystical/charismatic leadership, mystical immanence of the Divine, worship through materiality, devekut [mystical union], minhag [custom], and ecstatic forms of music and dance. Corequisite: REL529 or equivalent.

**REL571**  
Centering Prayer as Christian Contemplation (3)  
This course introduces the Christian contemplative practice of Centering Prayer, as taught by Fr. Thomas Keating and Contemplative Outreach. It places this practice in the broader tradition of Christian contemplation, as a path of transformation in Christ that allows greater freedom in oneself and greater compassion for others. The course includes instruction in an active practice for integrating Centering Prayer into daily life, a day of Intensive Practice and study of Christian contemplative practice. Cross-listed as REL271.

**REL583**  
Tibetan IV (4)  
This course continues to expand student knowledge of the grammar and vocabulary of literary Tibetan primarily through translating texts in different genres such as sutras, lives of Buddhist saints, history, philosophy and so forth. Also continues to develop student knowledge of spoken Tibetan. Prerequisite: REL553. Cross-listed as REL385.

**REL585**  
Spiritual Models of Social Action (3)  
A study of historical and contemporary figures who exemplify the spiritual ideals of nonviolent social action, tracing their unique ways of turning their personal challenges into nonviolent leadership. Drawing upon autobiography, biography, critical analysis, and film as source material, students develop a personal dialogue with each of these activists, examining how inner and outer journeys join in spiritually based social activism. Cross-listed as REL312.

**REL587**  
Sanskrit IV (4)  
This semester completes the range of Sanskrit grammar, with secondary conjugations, vocabulary acquisition, an investigation of etymology, and a study of the principles behind words and their meanings. In addition to finishing the textbook on grammar, the Devavanipravesika, the class reads examples of a range of Buddhist, Hindu, and secular verses. Increased attention is given to translation and the hands-on practice of bringing ancient texts into the contemporary world. Prerequisite: REL557. Cross-listed as REL387.
The main obstacles to shamatha are emphasized. Practical applications of breathing, walking meditation, and working with some of the core concepts are included. Guidance in sitting meditation posture, mindfulness cultivation, and the cultivation of maitri (loving-kindness). This course includes weekly discussion groups, individual meetings with a meditation instructor and daily meditation practice. MA and MDiv.

**Meditation Practicum II: Self and No-Self (3)**

Students are introduced to sitting meditation practice drawn from the Tibetan Buddhist tradition of shamatha-vipashyana. Weekly lectures emphasize experiential aspects of the practice, involving such topics as the discovery of impermanence, working with emotions and the cultivation of maitri (loving-kindness). This course includes weekly discussion groups, individual meetings with a meditation instructor and daily meditation practice. MA and MDiv.

**Communication: Family Systems (3)**

This class examines family patterns as they impact our ability to communicate with and to be present to others. By means of genograms, experiential exercises, family sculpting and the contemplative practices of basic attendance and exchange, students explore their ability to open and their “rules for commenting” in relationship. It is recommended that graduate students taking this class also enroll in the related 1-credit class, REL 616, Process Lab I.

**Tibetan V (3)**

This course continues to expand student knowledge of the grammar and vocabulary of literary Tibetan primarily through translating texts in different genres such as practice instructions, commentaries, songs of realization, lives of Buddhist saints, history, philosophy, and so forth. Also continues to develop student knowledge of spoken Tibetan. Prerequisite: REL603.

**Mindfulness Instructor Training I (1)**

The first in a three-course series training students to offer instruction in shamatha practice and being a mindfulness instructor. Participants develop skills in first-time meditation instruction and mentoring new practitioners. Guidance in sitting meditation posture, mindfulness of breathing, walking meditation, and working with some of the main obstacles to shamatha are emphasized. Practical demonstrations, mock interviews with faculty and peer feedback, lectures and discussion, and guided meditation sessions are included. Prerequisite: Students are accepted by application only, must have completed a Dathun, and must have maintained a consistent shamatha practice for at least one year. Course fee.

**First Turning of the Wheel: Nature of Mind and Emotions (3)**

The First Turning introduces the early discourses of the Buddha and the Abhidharma ("higher dharma") distillation of the Buddhist teachings on the nature, structure and operation of the mind and emotions. This course provides a selected survey of the essential texts from both the Northern (Vaibhashika) and Southern (Theravada) schools, along with historical context and applications to meditation practice. Required for both the History of Religions and the Tibetan Tradition emphases.

**Mind and Its World I (3)**

An in-depth systematic exploration of 1) the many types of minds and mental factors that arise and 2) the objects that comprise the world that mind experiences. Since delusion and suffering arise with respect to these, this study is the basis for understanding our experience, undoing delusion and generating insight. Required for both the Tibetan Tradition and History of Religions emphases.

**Conflict and Diversity (3)**

An examination of the nature of the human group-field. Of particular concern is how human groups create both helpful and harmful conditions in the world. This class provides the theoretical underpinnings of the group-field, including living systems theory, group dynamics, liberation theory, conflict theory and healthy communication models such as mediation and nonviolent communication. Woven throughout is a focus on the dynamics of privilege, power and diversity, and group-field process work as a way to engage group life. Cross-listed as REL315.

**Process Lab I (1)**

The first in a series of small groups in which students participate throughout their tenure in the Master of Divinity program. Emphasis is on providing support for the students’ journey. Taken concurrently with REL 602. Instructor approval required for non-MDIV students.

**Mindfulness Instructor Training II: Self and No-Self (3)**

Selflessness is considered a profound and difficult teaching. The subject is first approached indirectly by exploring the deeply conceptualized nature of human experience. This leads to identifying our experience of having a "self" and analyzing this "self" using analytical meditation. Does it exist or is it just an emotionalized fabrication? Based on the Theravada and Tibetan Shedra traditions. Prerequisite: REL600 or permission of instructor.
REL624
Mind and Its World II (3)
An exploration of the dynamics of samsara and the path to liberation as presented primarily in Foundational Buddhism. Karma, the twelve links of dependent origination, rebirth, Buddhist cosmology, stages of the path, the nature of nirvana and so forth are examined. The historical spread of these teachings is also examined. Prerequisite: REL 614. Required for both the History of Religions and Tibetan Tradition emphases.

REL625
Prayer and Prophecy: Biblical Literatures (3)
Combining a survey of Judaeo-Christian canonical, biblical texts with their contemporaneous ancient near Eastern literatures including Gnosticism, this course introduces the student to traditions of prayer, ritual, and liturgy and enables the student to develop lectio divina as a contemplative practice. This course meets the needs of MDiv students preparing practices for pastoral care. The role and root of prophets in the Western engaged social justice and peacemaking lineages are explored. Finally, contemporary problems of textual interpretation influencing fundamentalism, gender, and concepts of God and spirituality today are addressed. Offered alternate years.

REL628
Studying Buddhism: Methods and Issues (3)
Given its diversity, what constitutes Buddhism? This course investigates traditional guidelines for understanding, interpreting and arranging the diverse teachings and practices of Buddhism. Contemporary transformations and interpretations of Buddhism also are considered. Topics covered include the role of lineages, teachers, meditation; and the use of intellect, community, personal experience and so forth.

REL631E
Musar and Pietism: The Jewish Ethical Tradition (3)
This course surveys the teachings and literature of the major pietistic trends from the Middle Ages until modern day. Emphasis is placed on the medieval pietistic teachings of Bachya Ibn Pequdah and Abraham Maimonides and their relationship with Sufi teachings; on the pietistic teachings of 16th century Safed as expressed in texts such as Reishit Chochmah; on the writings of Moshe Chayyim Lubavitz; on the teachings of the East European Musar schools of Slobodka, Novhorodok and Salant; and on modern expressions of Musar such as those found in the writings of Levinas, Hutner, and Soloveichik. The transformational practices of these schools is explored through introspective and interpersonal exercises. Co requisite: REL529 or equivalent.

REL634
Hindu Tantra-Yoga (3)
Hindu Tantra envisions Ultimate Reality as intertwined aspects of Shiva and Shakti. We study contemplative theory and practices from Tantric texts and commentaries, including sacred ritual, deity forms, mantra, yantra (sacred geometry), nyasa (sacred energetic placements), chakras, and visualizations. We also explore Kashmir Shavism, a nondualistic monism, and the Sridvyda Goddess tradition. Tantric influences in Indian poetry, art, and dance-music forms are shared whenever possible. The last class features a culminating class worship ritual (puja) incorporating many Tantric contemplative tools studied all semester. Offered alternate years. Crosslisted as REL334.

REL635
Meditation Practicum III: Mind-Training (3)
This course continues instruction in meditation practice, emphasizing Mahayana practice, including the generation of an enlightened attitude (bodhicitta), the practice of the perfections (paramitas), the training of the mind (lojong), and the exchange of the self and other (tonglen). Based on the Indian and Tibetan traditions. Prerequisite: REL620 or permission of the instructor.

REL644E
Contemplative Judaism Practicum: Prayer and Meditation (3)
This experiential course provides students with instruction and guidance in traditional and contemporary modes of Jewish contemplative practice. Practices include davenen (traditional liturgical prayer), Hebrew letter manipulation and chanting, visualization practices, contemplative ritual, niggunim (melodic meditation), breathing practices, Lurianic prayer, musar practices, hasidic dancing, HaBaD hitbonenu (contemplation) practice and contemporary expressions of Jewish meditation. Prerequisites: Classical Jewish Mysticism and Hasidism. Prerequisites: REL 529, REL543e and REL561e.

REL645
Methods and Issues in the Study of Religion (3)
This course examines a variety of methodologies that have been and continue to be used to study religion. Scanning a range of religious phenomena, from the mystical experience, to myth and ritual, sacred image, word, space and more, we explore the writings of scholars who have drawn on philosophical, sociological, comparative, feminist and postmodern methodologies. The aim of the course is as much to build a theoretical foundation for the further study of religion as to provide a forum to examine and develop our own understanding and definitions of the religious life. Readings include work by James, Otto, Buber, Levi-Strauss, Some, Turner, Eliade.
REL650
Buddhist Meditation Intensive (0)
In this 28-day intensive group meditation, students practice shamatha-vipassana in Tibetan, Zen, or Insight Meditation traditions under the guidance of trained meditation instructors. The choice of retreat is approved by Religious Studies faculty and School Director beforehand. This training can provide experiential, direct insight into the nature of mind and the Buddhist teachings. The meditation intensive is a noncredit requirement for the MA in Religious Studies: Indo-Tibetan Buddhism (with or without Language) and the Master of Divinity programs. Students should complete the meditation intensive during the winter break of their first year or the summer following their first year.

REL651
Contemplative Practice Intensive: Religious Studies Students (0)
This 28-day group contemplative practice intensive can be done at an established contemplative center in a faith tradition of the student’s choice: Christian monastery, Hindu ashram, Tibetan Buddhist meditation center, Jewish Contemplative retreat center, Zen monastery, etc. The retreat gives the participant an opportunity to practice a prescribed discipline while living in community with others in a contemplative environment. The choice of retreat is to be approved by Religious Studies faculty and School Director beforehand. The contemplative practice intensive is a non-credit requirement for MA in Religious Studies: Contemplative Religions [with or without Language] and Master of Divinity programs. Students should complete the contemplative practice intensive during the winter break of their first year or the summer following their first year.

REL654
Process Lab II (1)
A continuation of REL 616. MDiv, taken concurrently with REL 615. Prerequisite: REL616.

REL655
Trends in Religious Studies (3)
Can a scholar be both a participant and an observer? The field of religious studies is emboiled in a debate between objectivity and reflexivity. In recent years, a demand for new methods that allow the scholar’s voice and participation to be present and engaged in the process of observation has created space for reflexive, narrative, inter-textual and qualitative methods. In this course, we explore religious studies through the lens of current issues such as ecology, religion and science, postcolonial approaches, politics and the interaction of religion with race, class and gender through the social sciences.

REL658
Homiletics and Ritual Arts (3)
This class examines working with ritual through dharma talks, and homiletics: the art of spiritual teaching. Community-based rituals such as weddings, funerals, blessings, and rites of passage equip chaplains to serve their constituencies. Additional examples of ritual practice include dialogue, wisdom circles, and restorative justice. Students are trained to deliver sermons, dharma talks, and dialogues, small group teaching, utilizing effective methods of discourse and facilitation.

REL661
Second Turning of the Wheel: The Bodhisattva Path (3)
This course examines the philosophical view, meditation practice and compassionate action of the bodhisattva path, as expressed in the Mahayana texts. Prajnaparamita and the Vimalakirti sutras provide the ground from which the bodhisattva path is explored in Santideva’s Bodhicaryavatara. Finally, the ultimate view of emptiness is explored in the work of Nagarjuna’s ‘Root Verses of the Middle Way’ and its commentaries. Required for both the History of Religions and the Tibetan Tradition emphases. Prerequisite: REL611.

REL663E
Jewish Law: Traditional, Progressive, Radical (3)
This course investigates the philosophic and mystical underpinnings of Jewish law. Issues include tradition and change, interpretive freedom, authority, ritual as magic, kabbalistic vs. philosphic views of halakhah [Jewish law], antinomian trends, and contemporary expressions of halakhic practice. Ranging from the Talmudic to modern periods, this course emphasizes the teachings of Mendelsohn, Hirsch, Rosenzweig, Mordechai Kaplan, Soloveitchik, Hartman, Levinas, and Zalman Schachter-Shalomi. Special attention is given to how these teachers understand the relationship between Jewish law and the process of inner transformation. Corequisite: REL529 or equivalent.

REL672
Non-Dualism in Theory and Practice (3)
An exploration of issues in the study of what is often regarded as the most profound element of religious life: the non-dual and the mystical. How do we study the deepest elements of our own and other religious traditions? How do we remain conscious of the impact of our own assumptions, experiences and aspirations? Through these questions we interrogate and problematize both the non-dual experience and the scholarly endeavor, exploring fundamental considerations for the contemplative study of religion and spirituality.

REL676
Inner Oral Tradition of the Torah (3)
An examination of the mystical contemplative tradition of Judaism through a demonstration of its approach to Torah texts. The emphasis in the course is on the development and expression of critical thinking and intuition. Good questions are a priority over good answers. Age old Chassidic methodologies are used towards this end. Dramatization of stories are utilized to access the students’ emotions and intuitive powers. Exposure to practices like shofar and succah give the students a first hand experience of Jewish contemplative practice. Offered alternative years. Cross-listed as REL376.
Shambhala Training Level I: The Art of Being Human (1)
Shambhala Training is the path of study and practice of Shambhala warriorship—the tradition of human bravery, not being afraid of who you are. This path shows how to take the challenges of daily life in our modern society as opportunities for contemplative practice. Shambhala Training is inspired by the ancient legend of the Kingdom of Shambhala, said to be an enlightened society based on gentle and fearless action. The Shambhala Training path of study and practice begins with a series of weekend levels, known as the Heart of Warriorship—which provides the tools you need to establish a personal discipline of meditation practice and to discover the basic principles of warriorship in your daily life.

Shambhala Training Level II: Birth of the Warrior (1)
Shambhala Training is the path of study and practice of Shambhala warriorship—the tradition of human bravery, not being afraid of who you are. This path shows how to take the challenges of daily life in our modern society as opportunities for contemplative practice. Shambhala Training is inspired by the ancient legend of the Kingdom of Shambhala, said to be an enlightened society based on gentle and fearless action. The Shambhala Training path of study and practice begins with a series of weekend levels, known as the Heart of Warriorship—which provides the tools you need to establish a personal discipline of meditation practice and to discover the basic principles of warriorship in your daily life.

Shambhala Training Level III: Warrior in the World (1)
Shambhala Training is the path of study and practice of Shambhala warriorship—the tradition of human bravery, not being afraid of who you are. This path shows how to take the challenges of daily life in our modern society as opportunities for contemplative practice. Shambhala Training is inspired by the ancient legend of the Kingdom of Shambhala, said to be an enlightened society based on gentle and fearless action. The Shambhala Training path of study and practice begins with a series of weekend levels, known as the Heart of Warriorship—which provides the tools you need to establish a personal discipline of meditation practice and to discover the basic principles of warriorship in your daily life.

Shambhala Training Level IV: Awakened Heart (1)
Shambhala Training is the path of study and practice of Shambhala warriorship—the tradition of human bravery, not being afraid of who you are. This path shows how to take the challenges of daily life in our modern society as opportunities for contemplative practice. Shambhala Training is inspired by the ancient legend of the Kingdom of Shambhala, said to be an enlightened society based on gentle and fearless action. The Shambhala Training path of study and practice begins with a series of weekend levels, known as the Heart of Warriorship—which provides the tools you need to establish a personal discipline of meditation practice and to discover the basic principles of warriorship in your daily life.

Shambhala Training Level V: Open Sky (1)
Shambhala Training is the path of study and practice of Shambhala warriorship—the tradition of human bravery, not being afraid of who you are. This path shows how to take the challenges of daily life in our modern society as opportunities for contemplative practice. Shambhala Training is inspired by the ancient legend of the Kingdom of Shambhala, said to be an enlightened society based on gentle and fearless action. The Shambhala Training path of study and practice begins with a series of weekend levels, known as the Heart of Warriorship—which provides the tools you need to establish a personal discipline of meditation practice and to discover the basic principles of warriorship in your daily life.

Shambhala Training Level VI: Great Eastern Sun (1)
Shambhala Training is the path of study and practice of Shambhala warriorship—the tradition of human bravery, not being afraid of who you are. This path shows how to take the challenges of daily life in our modern society as opportunities for contemplative practice. Shambhala Training is inspired by the ancient legend of the Kingdom of Shambhala, said to be an enlightened society based on gentle and fearless action. The Shambhala Training path of study and practice begins with a series of weekend levels, known as the Heart of Warriorship—which provides the tools you need to establish a personal discipline of meditation practice and to discover the basic principles of warriorship in your daily life.

Independent Study: Religious Studies (0.5)
This course offering is an opportunity for students to engage in in-depth, concentrated study with a particular faculty member for a semester. The design of study and coursework are decided upon by the student and faculty member.

The Middle Way School (3)
This uncompromising rejection of stable findable existence in any phenomena is a radical challenge to our sense of having an existent self that experiences solid objects. Its famous teaching of emptiness has generated a range of interpretations, which are explored, particularly in the Tibetan Kagyū, Nyingma and Geluk schools. Required for both the History of Religions and Tibetan Tradition emphases. Prerequisite: REL661.

Translation Project: Tibetan (1.5)
One-on-one mentoring of a Tibetan language student by a senior translator. The student selects a Tibetan text or portion of a text in consultation with the senior translator. The goal is to deepen the student’s knowledge of the grammar, vocabulary, cultural context and content of the specific text and genre. Students may only take this class with the permission of the department.
REL703
Translation Project: Sanskrit (1.5)
One-on-one mentoring of a Sanskrit language student by a senior translator. The student selects a Sanskrit text or portion of a text in consultation with the senior translator. The goal is to deepen the student’s knowledge of the grammar, vocabulary, cultural context, and content of the specific text and genre. Students may only take this class with the permission of the department.

REL705
Mind Only School (1.5)
The Mind Only School provides an insightful exploration into how we create and maintain the illusion of our projections, along with all the suffering that such illusion engenders. Analytical meditation is used to explore this process of conceptual and emotional projection and how we might transform it. Students register for this course through Naropa but take it in their Nitartha Institute summer program. Prerequisites: REL 614 and REL 624. Required for Tibetan Tradition emphasis. Prerequisite: REL614 and REL624.

REL709W
Mindfulness Instructor Training II (1)
Second in a three-course series training students to offer instruction in shamatha mindfulness meditation, this course presents the development of maitri, in the sense of unconditional friendliness toward oneself, as the ground of practice. Students develop skills in ongoing meditation mentorship, emphasizing guidance in working with conflicting emotions. Practical demonstrations, mock interviews with faculty and peer feedback, lectures and discussions, and guided meditation sessions are included. Prerequisite: REL609W. Course fee.

REL710
Third Turning of the Wheel (3)
An examination of the most important perspectives, ideas and practices of the Third Turning orientation of the Yogacara, which emphasizes meditation and the dynamics of emptiness. Our study includes reading from core sutras such as the Samdhinirmocana, the Lankavatara and the Avatamsaka, as well as from commentaries of Asanga, Vasubandhu and others. Our understanding is illuminated by modern interpretations of both Asian and Western scholars. Required for both the History of Religions and the Tibetan Tradition emphases. Prerequisite: REL661.

REL714
Introduction to Pastoral Care (3)
This course focuses on the essential elements and specific skills necessary for effective counseling in the context of ministry. It will correlate the relationship between pastoral care and religious ethics, with a special emphasis on Buddhist and Christian comparative ethics. The theories and practices of spiritual and psychological assessment are presented, as well as experiential listening, navigating boundaries, ritual, prayer, and self-care.

REL720
Buddha Nature and Shentong (1.5)
An exploration of the Buddha Nature tradition that proclaims all beings to have the capacity to uncover enlightened qualities already present within themselves but that are presently blocked from view by their obscurations. Includes a discussion of how this sutra tradition leads to, and finds its fulfillment in, the Vajrayana. Students register for this course through Naropa but take it in their Nitartha Institute summer program. Required for Tibetan Tradition emphasis. Prerequisite: REL614 and REL624.

REL725
Contemplative Practice Intensive (Residential Retreat) (3)
The residential component of the program aims to facilitate the deeper integration and embodiment of the central contemplative practices covered over the course of the program. The retreat consists of an intensive practice-format, with sitting practice, movement-based practice and process-oriented exercises. During this five-day retreat, each day consists of nine program hours. Note: For M.A. degree students, residential attendance is required. For Online Certificate students, residential attendance or participation in the residential retreat through an online format (if available) or attendance at a local retreat approved by the faculty coordinator of the program will be acceptable. Prerequisites: REL543e and REL561e.

REL728
Process Lab III (1)
A continuation of REL 654. MDiv only. Prerequisite: REL654. To be taken concurrently with REL 658.

REL747
Master of Divinity Field Work I (0)
The CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education) internship gives Master of Divinity students the opportunity to explore personal and professional growth issues in their roles as interfaith chaplains in various settings. Through weekly seminars, didactics, theological reflections and individual and group supervision, students explore the purpose and meaning of providing pastoral care to people in crisis. Strong emphasis is placed on the students’ understanding of their own personal issues and dynamics as these arise in the process of helping others. MDiv only.

REL749
Contemporary American Religion (3)
This course explores the diversity of American religious life from numerous perspectives, thereby providing students with the practical vocabulary to both understand and interact with the diversity of contemporary religious life. Students survey American religious communities [Christian, Muslim, Jewish, etc.] and examine specific beliefs, rituals and liturgical practices and their application in crisis and transition situations that span the human life cycle such as birth, marriage, illness and death. The class also provides hands-on opportunities for students to both visit local religious communities and learn from practitioners in these communities.
REL751
Buddhism in Tibet (3)
This course traces the development of Buddhism in Tibet, principally during the first and second spreading of Buddhism when most of the classical forms of Tibetan Buddhism evolved. Attention is given to the various roles of Nikaya, Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism and to the interplay of religious, social and political factors in this process. Special attention is paid to Tibet’s unique contributions to Buddhism. Required for History of Religions sequence (not for MDiv). Offered on alternative years.

REL760
Vajrayana: Symbol, Inconography, and Ritual (3)
This course explores selected literature of Vajrayana Buddhism in Tibet, from its inception in the seventh century until the Tibetan diaspora in 1959, with emphasis upon the tantric saint and the tantric goddess, or dakini. Readings from several genres include biographical and sacred histories, realization literature, and meditation manuals. The challenges of interpreting symbols and iconography in religion, especially when they are gendered, are examined. Offered alternate years. Prerequisite REL624 or REL661.

REL763
Religious Education (3)
This course introduces lifespan religious education, including an examination of the history, current trends, foundational theories, and applicable skills. Topics include theories of learning from both Western and Eastern perspectives, stages of faith and moral development, venues for religious education, skill training in curriculum development and lesson planning.

REL768
Process Lab IV (1)
This course is a continuation of REL 728. MDiv only. Prerequisite: REL728.

REL779
Interreligious Dialogue (3)
This course introduces the student to the creative potential of interreligious dialogue for expanding one’s theology and communicating effectively and compassionately across the American religious spectrum. After developing savvy with views of dialogue, students learn essential skills and protocols applicable to a variety of dialogue settings. Classes also include dialogue practical workshops.

REL780
Meditation Practicum IV: Maitri and Mandala (3)
This course continues the practicum sequence, emphasizing Vajrayana topics such as mandala principle and the Buddha families, including discussion of the neurosis and sanity associated with each family. Space awareness practice (maitri) provides a personal experience of these families, and this practice is a central part of this class. Based on the Indian and Tibetan traditions. Prerequisites: REL635 or permission of the instructor.

REL790W
Shambhala Training Level VII: Windhorse (1)
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REL791W
Shambhala Training Level VIII: Drala (1)
Shambhala Training is the path of study and practice of Shambhala warriorship—the tradition of human bravery, not being afraid of who you are. This path shows how to take the challenges of daily life in our modern society as opportunities for contemplative practice. Shambhala Training is inspired by the ancient legend of the Kingdom of Shambhala, said to be an enlightened society based on gentle and fearless action. The Shambhala Training path of study and practice begins with a series of weekend levels, known as the Heart of Warriorship—which provides the tools you need to establish a personal discipline of meditation practice and to discover the basic principles of warriorship in your daily life.

REL792W
Shambhala Training Level IX: Meek (1)
Shambhala Training is the path of study and practice of Shambhala warriorship—the tradition of human bravery, not being afraid of who you are. This path shows how to take the challenges of daily life in our modern society as opportunities for contemplative practice. Shambhala Training is inspired by the ancient legend of the Kingdom of Shambhala, said to be an enlightened society based on gentle and fearless action. The Shambhala Training path of study and practice begins with a series of weekend levels, known as the Heart of Warriorship—which provides the tools you need to establish a personal discipline of meditation practice and to discover the basic principles of warriorship in your daily life.

REL793W
Shambhala Training Level X: Perky (1)
Shambhala Training is the path of study and practice of Shambhala warriorship—the tradition of human bravery, not being afraid of who you are. This path shows how to take the challenges of daily life in our modern society as opportunities for contemplative practice. Shambhala Training is inspired by the ancient legend of the Kingdom of Shambhala, said to be an enlightened society based on gentle and fearless action. The Shambhala Training path of study and practice begins with a series of weekend levels, known as the Heart of Warriorship—which provides the tools you need to establish a personal discipline of meditation practice and to discover the basic principles of warriorship in your daily life.
REL794W
Shambhala Training Level XI: Outrageous & Inscrutable (1)
Shambhala Training is the path of study and practice of Shambhala
warriorship—the tradition of human bravery, not being afraid of
who you are. This path shows how to take the challenges of
daily life in our modern society as opportunities for contemplative
practice. Shambhala Training is inspired by the ancient legend
of the Kingdom of Shambhala, said to be an enlightened society
based on gentle and fearless action. The Shambhala Training
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REL795W
Shambhala Training Level XII: Golden Key (1)
Shambhala Training is the path of study and practice of Shambhala
warriorship—the tradition of human bravery, not being afraid of
who you are. This path shows how to take the challenges of
daily life in our modern society as opportunities for contemplative
practice. Shambhala Training is inspired by the ancient legend
of the Kingdom of Shambhala, said to be an enlightened society
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known as the Heart of Warriorship—which provides the tools you
need to establish a personal discipline of meditation practice and
to discover the basic principles of warriorship in your daily life.

REL803
MDIV Research and Methodology (1.5)
This course provides students with an overview of research
methodology and applied theology in preparation for the MDiv
culminating project. MDiv only.

REL804
Applied Ethics and Service Learning (2)
For third-year MDiv students, this class provides ongoing instruction,
direction, and guidance for student fieldwork, with special emphasis
on the application of ethical principles in the context of ministry in
the community. Students and instructors meet weekly, focusing on
the nature and meaning of doing community-based and spiritually
engaged fieldwork in the arenas of pastoral care and change
agency. The Naropa Chaplaincy Project is the site for the service
learning aspect of the course.

REL809W
Mindfulness Instructor Training III (1)
Third in a three-course series training students to offer instruction in
shamatha mindfulness meditation. It emphasizes guiding people in
practicing with extreme challenges of mind and body. Participants
develop skills in offering ongoing guidance in sitting and walking
mindfulness meditations, as well as body-scan, practicing with
physical pain, and mindfulness in daily life activities. Students
train in offering both one-on-one mentorship, small group guided
mindfulness instruction, and explaining the view of mindfulness
meditation to various populations. Practices to support the well-
being of care-givers and teachers are presented. Educational
methods of the course include practice demonstrations, mock
interviews, lectures, discussions, and individual interviews.
Prerequisite REL709W. Course fee.

REL820E
Advanced Mystical Text Seminar (3)
This course provides the opportunity for advanced study of one or
several mystical texts from the Kabbalistic and/or Hasidic traditions.
All texts are studied in translation from Hebrew and/or Aramaic.
The author, text or topic changes each semester according to
the specific needs of the students. Some of the texts we may
study include the works of: Isaac the Blind, Azriel of Gerona,
Nachmanides, Joseph Gikaltlia, the Zohar, Meir Ibn Gabbai,
Moses Cordovero, Isaiah Horowitz, Isaac Luria, Hayyim Vital,
the Baal Shem Tov, the Maggid of Mezheritch, Ya’aqov Yosef of
Polonoyye, Menahem Mendel of Vitebsk, Levi Yizhaq of Berditchev,
Menahem Nahum of Chernoby, Elimelekh of Lishensk, Shneur
Zalman of Liadi, Nahman of Brazlav, and Mordekhai Yosef Leiner,
inter alia. Prerequisite: Classical Jewish Mysticism and Hasidism
and/or its equivalent. Prerequisites: REL543e and REL561e.

REL853
MDiv. Thesis Seminar (1.5)
This course includes peer and individual supervision and feedback
in the preparation and presentation of the MDiv culminating project.
MDiv only.

REL880
Comprehensive Exam (0)
For Students in the MA and MDiv programs only. Please see your
advisor for more information.

REL885
MA/MDiv Final Project (0)
MA only.

REL886
Extended Master’s Project (0.5)
Students who have not completed the master’s project may qualify
for an extension of the master’s project semester. May be repeated.
MA and MDiv only.