

Religious Studies 4210: Spirituality in America
Georgia State University
Spring 2008

First Paper Assignment

Please choose one option from the two options presented below:

OPTION 1.

For this option you must do a close reading and analysis of one of the following texts: the Baha'i prayer texts we discussed in class; Black Elk's "Wiowanyag Wachipi," Starhawk's "The Covenant"; the Jewish prayer texts we examined in class; or Iyengar, "The Tree and its Parts." You'll need to choose one of these, read it closely, take notes on it and analyze it in your paper. You will not need any other primary or secondary sources, though the ideas we discuss in class surely will help you as you analyze your text.

OPTION 2.

Make up your own topic. If you do this option, you must clear your topic with me beforehand, and you must still follow the essay instructions below.

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

Whatever option you choose, you will need to begin with a clear and succinct statement of your thesis. As you know, your thesis is your main argument. It should state clearly what you want to say in the paper. *If you do option 1 your thesis will say something about the structure or the content of the spirituality illustrated in the text.*

How should I arrive at a thesis? A thesis is often an answer to a simple question you might have about a text. The thing to do, then, is start asking questions about the text you're reading. Here are some questions you might ask as you study your text:

1. What is the logic of religious experience in this text? How does religious experience *work* here?
2. What are the recurring images or metaphors for mind, self or other entities in this text? Why are they important? How do they give shape to the text?
3. What are the unresolved tensions or ambiguities in this text? How do they drive or shape the text?

There are many other questions you might ask. While you are studying and taking notes about your text you can think about lots of questions. But when you get ready to outline and draft your paper you should choose one question and try to answer it. We will work through different questions and answers in class.

In your final draft I'll be looking for focus and clear argumentation. To help you focus, follow the outline below closely:

1. An initial paragraph that is one sentence long. This paragraph should contain the thesis. One sentence is all you have.
2. Paragraphs that support the thesis.
3. A concluding paragraph.

When I evaluate your paper I'm going to be asking these questions:

- 1) Is there a clear thesis?
- 2) Is the rest of the paper organized as a sustained argument for the thesis?
- 3) Is the analysis clearly presented and accurate?
- 4) Are the ideas creative and sufficiently nuanced?

A good, 1-2-page (single spaced) draft of your paper is due at the beginning of class on Tuesday, 2/5. This first paper assignment is worth 20% of your total course grade, and since I am grading everything on a "point" system, this paper will be worth 20 points. About half of the grade for this paper, or 8 points, will be based solely on your draft due Tuesday, 2/5. If you bring a good, 1-2-page draft to class you'll get 8 of 8 points. If you do not bring a draft to class that day you will receive 0 of 8 points. If you bring a short or inadequate draft I will downgrade your draft accordingly. In short: All you have to do is bring a good 1-2-page draft to class on 2/5, AND HALF OF YOUR GRADE FOR THIS PAPER ALREADY WILL BE AN "A."

The final draft of the paper is due at 5pm on Friday 2/8.