

INTRODUCTION TO THE MIDDLE EAST, AFRICA, ASIA
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'In order to assist communities to understand these linkages, we developed a citizen education program, during which people identify their problems, the causes and possible solutions. They then make connections between their own personal actions and the problems they witness in the environment and in society. They learn that our world is confronted with a litany of woes: corruption, violence against women and children, disruption and breakdown of families, and disintegration of cultures and communities. They also identify the abuse of drugs and chemical substances, especially among young people. There are also devastating diseases that are defying cures or occurring in epidemic proportions. Of particular concern are HIV/AIDS, malaria and diseases associated with malnutrition. On the environment front, they are exposed to many human activities that are devastating to the environment and societies. These include widespread destruction of ecosystems, especially through deforestation, climatic instability, and contamination in the soils and waters that all contribute to excruciating poverty.

In the process, the participants discover that they must be part of the solutions. They realize their hidden potential and are empowered to overcome inertia and take action. They come to recognize that they are the primary custodians and beneficiaries of the environment that sustains them.

Entire communities also come to understand that while it is necessary to hold their governments accountable, it is equally important that in their own relationships with each other, they exemplify the leadership values they wish to see in their own leaders, namely justice, integrity and trust.

Although initially the Green Belt Movement's tree planting activities did not address issues of democracy and peace, it soon became clear that responsible governance of the environment was impossible without democratic space. Therefore, the tree became a symbol for the democratic struggle in Kenya. Citizens were mobilised to challenge widespread abuses of power, corruption and environmental mismanagement. In Nairobi's Uhuru Park, at Freedom Corner, and in many parts of the country, trees of peace were planted to demand the release of prisoners of conscience and a peaceful transition to democracy.

Through the Green Belt Movement, thousands of ordinary citizens were mobilized and empowered to take action and effect change. They learned to overcome fear and a sense of helplessness and moved to defend democratic rights. In time, the tree also became a symbol for peace and conflict resolution, especially during ethnic conflicts in Kenya when the Green Belt Movement used peace trees to reconcile disputing communities. During the ongoing re-writing of the Kenyan constitution, similar trees of peace were planted in many parts of the country to promote a culture of peace. Using trees as a symbol of peace is in keeping with a widespread African tradition. For example, the elders of the Kikuyu carried a staff from the thigi tree that, when placed between two disputing sides, caused them to stop fighting and seek reconciliation. Many communities in Africa have these traditions. Such practises are part of an extensive cultural heritage, which contributes both to the conservation of habitats and to cultures of peace. With the destruction of these cultures and the introduction of new values, local biodiversity is no longer valued or protected and as a result, it is quickly degraded and disappears. For this reason, The Green Belt Movement explores the

concept of cultural biodiversity, especially with respect to indigenous seeds and medicinal plants.

As we progressively understood the causes of environmental degradation, we saw the need for good governance. Indeed, the state of any county's environment is a reflection of the kind of governance in place, and without good governance there can be no peace. Many countries, which have poor governance systems, are also likely to have conflicts and poor laws protecting the environment.

In 2002, the courage, resilience, patience and commitment of members of the Green Belt Movement, other civil society organizations, and the Kenyan public culminated in the peaceful transition to a democratic government and laid the foundation for a more stable society.'

Wangari Maathai, Acceptance speech, Nobel Peace Prize, 2004

'We all possess pure, brilliant, expansive Fundamental Mind which remains unchanged throughout eternity. Its brilliance could not be matched by even a thousand suns rising together.

To compare the huge endless universe to this Fundamental Mind would be like comparing a single grain of millet to an endless ocean. This Fundamental Mind is unimaginable and indescribable, and to possess it is the greatest of all possible glories. This Mind is filled with complete wisdom and virtue, and is therefore called Natural Wisdom.'

Ven. Song Chol

Course Description

This course is designed to engage students in learning and discussion about the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. Organizing themes will include social, political, economic organization, religion, class structures, gender, race, the historical movements of colonialism and nationalism, resistance movements, and their legacies in the twentieth century. Case studies from the Middle East include Iran; from Africa, Namibia, Cameroon and Kenya; and from Asia, Vietnam and Buddhism.

Topics covered in the course include historiography, Arab-Islamic civilization, inter-communal relations in the Arab world, the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal Empires, creation of modern nation-states, Africa's "triple heritage" of indigenous customs, Islam, and interaction with the West, slavery, colonial economies and administrations, women and imperialism, indigenous women's movements, economic globalization. In addition to required texts, we will explore these topics through social biography, examination of primary sources, literature, film, and music. Comparative analysis, including comparison with various aspects of U.S. history will be stressed.

This course introduces students to three historiographical models and teaches students how to identify and critique these through a range of case studies. They are: Modernization Theory; Feminist Historiography; History as Dharma.

This course introduces an approach to history that understands history as dharma or teachings, as exemplified in the perspective of such great historian/leaders as Ghandi. Sat means Truth in Sanskrit and was the basis for the Satyagraha project of Mohandas K. Ghandi. Satyagraha was a forceful or firm (agraha) movement for Truth that helped to bring about India's independence from British colonial rule in 1947.

Our goal is to explore the possibilities of developing a new method of studying history informed by the principles of Satyagraha based in Yogic and Buddhist traditions. Theories of history shape our views of change over time. Most theories of history are based on dualistic, oppositional models of power. We explore these dualisms attempting to connect to their source.

The study of history brings to the foreground the roots of violence and of suffering. From the Yogic perspective, suffering is caused by the identification of ego with higher Self; and from minds full of craving, aversion, and a sense of separation- all of which all humans struggle with... In this course we'll examine the nature of suffering and the Yogic insight that uniting opposite patterns within the nervous system (Sun/Moon) opens up the core of the body to experience its innate freedom. From this perspective we return history to its place in epistemology or theories of knowing, and in ontology, theories of becoming.

This course prepares students to experience themselves as historical actors in order to engage with the material in a vibrant way. Students will have opportunities to practice aspects of Yogic traditions; and to engage in a Karma Yoga Project related to the topics raised, that links international and domestic realities. Students develop skills necessary to historical inquiry, such as concentration, observation, attentiveness, listening, patience, being present, all of which will benefit you in all of your studies as well as life experiences.

The Buddha said- don't believe what anyone tells you- find out for yourself. This was because to know the true meaning of practice one has to practice. As closely as possible this course enables students to 'find out for themselves' through examining the process of learning from a Yogic perspective; through reinventing historiography or methods of doing history; and through exploring possible interactions with grassroots organizations in the regions addressed.