

Professor Todd Lewis describes the design of a traditional Japanese tea garden and how the space is utilized in the tea ceremony.



JOHN BUCKINGHAM

## Zen Buddhism with Professor Todd Lewis

BY PAMELA REPONEN

### DESCRIPTION

Examination of Zen Buddhism and its influences on East Asian civilizations through surveys of the texts and monastic practices that define Zen spiritual cultivation, and study of the history of the Soto and Rinzai schools' evolution. Focus on the poetic, fine arts and martial arts disciplines this tradition has inspired in China and Japan.

### TOPICS

"Foundations"; "East Asian Transmission and Origins of Chan"; "Zen Doctrine, Zen Practices"; "Zen and the Fine Arts"

### PROFESSOR RECOMMENDATION

"Have an open, questing 'beginner's mind.'"

### SAMPLE TEXTS

*Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*, Paul Reys, ed.; *Zen Enlightenment*, by Heinrich Dumoulin; *Zen Brushwork*, by Tanchu Terayama; *Japanese Garden Design*, by Marc Keene; *Zen Spirit, Christian Spirit*, by Robert Kennedy; *The Book of Tea*, by Kakuzo Okakura

### REQUIREMENTS

Three papers; Zen assignment; final examination; class participation

### ON THE DAY HCM VISITED CLASS

"Zen and Tea": PowerPoint presentation and discussion about the tradition of the Japanese tea ceremony, with reflection on the ideals of discipline, repetition, patience and aesthetics that flow from the experience.

### THE ZEN ASSIGNMENT

A terse, in-depth, written exploration of a particular topic in the field of Zen Buddhism or on a theme related to some aspect of Zen spirituality

of special interest to the students, culminating with in-class presentations of their projects. **SAMPLE TOPICS IN THE SPRING SEMESTER** Zen meditation practice; "fly-fishing, nature, photography and Zen"; "Zen Buddhism and its presence within the *Star Wars* franchise"; construction of a Japanese teahouse niche (*tokonoma*)

### PROFESSOR BIO

Earning his Ph.D. in religion in 1984 at Columbia University in New York City, Professor Lewis joined the Holy Cross faculty in 1990 and became professor of religious studies in 2003; he specializes in Buddhism, Hinduism, East Asian religions, anthropology of religions, and modernization, ecology and religion. Author/co-author of many scholarly books and journal articles, Lewis is co-editor of the award-winning book *Sugata Saurabha: An Epic Poem from Nepal on the Life of the Buddha* by Chittadhar Hridaya and co-author of the textbook *World Religions Today*. The recipient of numerous awards and grants, he served as a Fulbright senior faculty research fellow, South Asia, 2012, and a Guggenheim Foundation fellow, 2011, and directed several summer institutes at Holy Cross, funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. He has also presented papers nationally and internationally and produced several films for classroom use.

### PROFESSOR QUOTE

"In this course, I require students to read classic texts to see the logic of central Buddhist doctrines, and study its monastic history," says Lewis. "In addition to analyzing the basic teachings centered on compassion and moral living, we also meet with a local *roshi* (religious master) to do *zazen* meditation. ... What makes this course different from others I offer is

having students go on to experience the myriad artistic expressions in Japan inspired by Zen. We explore traditions that draw on the belief that the 'Buddha nature' can be found in us and in all facets of life: these range from ink brush painting and poetry to the martial arts; from flower arranging and gardening, to *cha-do*, 'the way of tea.' Through these students get a glimpse of how the Buddhist ideals of egolessness, living fully in each moment, and cultivating loving kindness for all creation are involved in mastering these art forms."

### ALUMNA QUOTE

"Professor Lewis' course offers an opportunity for students to experience Zen Buddhism through readings and lectures, as well as through visual and experiential means," says Sarah Rowe '98 of New York City. "The presentations on Zen gardens, Japanese calligraphy, tea ceremony, and Zen meditation serve to convey the essence, interpretations, and influence of Zen Buddhism in the contemporary world. As I stepped into Professor Lewis' classroom, I was transported into a microcosm of Japanese culture on the Holy Cross campus. His enthusiasm and passion for Zen Buddhism was infectious, and after completing this course I yearned to travel to Japan and experience the gardens and monasteries firsthand. Soon after graduating from Holy Cross, I pursued an apprenticeship with a master ceramic artist in Japan and lived two years in a rural community. Professor Lewis' Zen Buddhism class and my journey to Japan continue to influence my practice as an artist and educator today."