



Program Objectives and Guiding Questions

In the Metaphysical Roadmaps program, you will be exploring these topics

- Learn about various theories of engagement within the field of religious studies. Some guiding questions for the first module will be:
 - What is the purpose and value of religion and spirituality?
 - How can we approach the study of diverse religious and spiritual paths?
 - What is religious pluralism?
 - How have various philosophers, intellectuals, activists, and academics historically viewed religion and spiritual life?
 - What are the benefits and liabilities of being an "insider" or "outsider" of a religious tradition when seeking to understand it?
 - Become acquainted with the philosophical heritage and metaphysical views within Buddhism and Hinduism.
- Study the foundational tenets of all six orthodox schools of Indian philosophy that form a web of philosophical diversity within Hinduism. Schools include: Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā, Vedānta (Uttara-Mīmāṃsā), Advaita Vedānta, Dvaita, Vedānta and Viśiṣṭādvaita, Yoga, Sāṃkhya, and Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika.
- Learn the basics of the Buddha's life and the primary division of teachings that construct the Pali canon (Tripiṭaka).
- Discover some of the attributes and differences between the Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna traditions.
- Through podcast interviews and videos, become exposed to a diverse blend of practitioners, monastics, and intellectuals who interface with Buddhism and Hinduism.



- Engage specifically with these questions as we analyze various traditions:
 - How is the problem of human suffering articulated and what is the remedy?
 - What is the relationship between empirical reality and metaphysical realms?
 - How are notions of the soul and/or true self defined?
 - How are various conceptions of God or reasoning for atheistic and agnostic positions presented?
 - What is the purpose of spiritual life within each tradition, and how are the primary practices elucidated?

- Give students time and opportunities to articulate to themselves, through reflective writing and conversations, how they are responding personally to the material, how it's impacting their views and self-understanding.



Welcome to Metaphysical Roadmaps

Dear Contemplatives:

If you wish to contemplate the spiritual mysteries of life and learn more about India's great philosophical legacy, one that includes yoga but also reaches beyond it, I have a gift for you. The *Metaphysical Roadmaps* course will take you on a ride that unpacks abundant traditions and ponders profound spiritual reflections. This course will also explore material that is very close to my heart.

One of my passions is studying the spiritual philosophies of India. While many people argue that studying philosophy is inert and doesn't "do anything," to change a human, I couldn't disagree more. The act of sustained contemplation on a text or proposition can be a sacred practice that impacts our perspectives, hearts, and actions. The usual suspects will all be there: you will read history and engage in writing and analysis. However, this course makes room for a special joy, one that can be found when a new idea is allowed to nest within us—in a quiet state of absorption; this is a moment that can give rise to profound insight and possibly, a genuine paradigm shift.

This course centers around the philosophical and metaphysical landscape of India's great religious traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism. It also reviews the very notion of spirituality and religion as a whole: how those constructs are defined and the value to be found in studying them. We also look at how these traditions have answered some of these questions: What is the meaning of life? What is human freedom? What is fundamentally real? What is the primary cause of human suffering, and how can we eradicate it? What is the role of spiritual practice? What is the nature of the cosmos and its relationship, if any, to non-physical realms? Is there a God (or Gods)? If there is or is not, what is the reasoning? What are the various conceptions of a soul or self?



Do not worry when new philosophical ideas challenge you. The moment we feel vulnerable because a concept isn't immediately landing in our minds in a happy cohesion is the moment we are ripe for transformation. Meet the discomfort and vulnerability with calm and loving-kindness. Studying philosophy is very much like going to the gym. The moment we feel the burn, the pain, and the exhaustion is the moment we instinctually want to stop and retract back into previously defined boundaries. But you are here to slowly and skillfully train beyond your current conceptually operational self. You are here to learn. Remember: this is ultimately for your personal development; there are no grades or research papers. But it's also not a cakewalk, so it's essential to practice compassion and self-care along the way.

Despite the expansive nature of the material, this is still an introductory course that presupposes no prior knowledge of the topics we explore. Module one provides everyone, regardless of their background, a solid foundation before we begin exploring more sophisticated philosophical material later in the course. Some of our students who have had previous training in yoga philosophy have found it helpful, but it's not necessary. And don't forget that after the course

completes, you will always have the reading and study kit to review whenever you wish! But perhaps most importantly, keep in mind that this course seeks to nurture self-knowledge and strengthen empathy while fostering a greater understanding of India's diverse spiritual landscape.

I look forward to our first conversation.

In Love and Learning

Sati (Shannon Chmelar)