

RLST206IH (ORIGINS OF GOD) COVID RESPONSES

Final discussion prompt:

The final discussion is your opportunity to apply some of the things we have learned this semester.

I am not concerned about style or format, given our current situations. I want you to be creative and have fun with this assignment! 500-800 words total.

CHOOSE **ONE** OF THE PROMPTS BELOW OR PROPOSE YOUR OWN PROMPT TO ME (VIA EMAIL) IF YOU LIKE.

PROMPT CHOICE #1:

Reflect on our current global situation and/or your personal experience. What pieces of wisdom do you think some of our primary sources offer to help deal with this or just wisdom for living generally. Find 6 quotes total from at least three of our sources to discuss. You may use quotes from our readings, from our discussions or from lectures/documentaries.

Marlene Ortiz-Martinez

The COVID-19 pandemic has proven to be an unprecedented moment in these times. Anitya, according to the Buddhist lecture refers the “impermanence” of things. As one of the three marks on existence, it is relevant to what we have been experiencing these past few weeks. This pandemic is a phase in life. Even though it’s something that has impacted us negatively, we must accept the fact that things change constantly. This pandemic has shown me the constant changes that we go through. At one point everything was normal and life in Bozeman was wonderful; however, with the spread of COVID-19 life has taken a twist. Now, we have been ordered to practice social distancing and stay at home to halt the spread of the virus. Therefore, I think that this pandemic has showcased the impermanence of things both at the national and international level. *Viparinama-dukkha*, however, can be applied more specifically to the current pandemic that plagues the globe. To be exact, *Viparinama-dukkha* means the insatiability or “suffering” that arises from the impermanence (Anitya). The COVID-19 pandemic in and of itself has given rise to the discontentment with life. What does the future hold for those that have lost their job? This can be particularly challenging, a time of suffering for those that consider their employment as the only source of income. I think this quite evident around the country as lower- and middle-class Americans struggle to make ends meet and bring in money to sustain their families.

However, I think that the COVID-19 can be elaborated a bit further by referencing to the Taoism lecture. “When knowledge and intelligence appear. Great hypocrisy shall arise. When the six various family relationships are not in harmony, filial piety and compassion shall arise. When a country is in chaos, the loyal official shall appear” (Ch. 18). As explained in the Taoism lecture, Yin represents passive principle, dark, shadowy, soft, cold, feminine, moon; and yang represents the opposite: active principle, light, solid, dry, masculine, sun. Things move alternatively between yin and yang. Simply put, there is no bad moment that comes to pass without a good moment too. I’ve learned to look at the COVID-19 pandemic as a dark moment in time; however, I’ve also learned to be patient and wait for the good moments to

come. Both good and bad moments are inevitable, and they occur one after the other. "It is easy to preserve when things are stable. It is easy to plan ahead when things have not yet occurred. If one waits until the affair has begun, then the situation is as brittle as ice that easily cracks and is fragile that easily shatters (Ch. 64). However, I think many individuals have forgotten that after each dark episode in life comes better, brighter days. This pandemic has shown me to not be surprised when bad moments like these become our reality rather Yin and yang suggest that we accept reality and wait for better moments!

What has religion taught you about every day life and difficult moments like these?

Shayne Utter

Rarely do events occur that every life around the globe is affected. From the uncertainty, challenges and tragedy that mark 2020 and the worldwide experience of the Coronavirus, life as we know it will and must change at the end of this pandemic. I feel that many of the religious and spiritual concepts that we have studied this semester provide insight to the complex and varying experiences of individuals during this time, a solution to many struggles being seen, along with inspiration and a call to action to not only overcome but to grow from this harrowing worldwide struggle.

One of the most commonly recognized principles of Buddhism is the cause, core, effect, and purpose of human suffering as well as how to succeed over this inherent human experience. Within the varying nation, state, and community wide efforts to combat this highly unknown virus and the physical suffering that infected individuals often experience by the encouragement and occasional enforcement of stay at home measures, there is a great amount of pushback amongst the general population due to perceived unjust suffering within facets of life such as economic stability and personal freedoms. While some are taking this opportunity to positively restructure their lives, to take a deep breath from monotonous routine and the stress of high paced life, many are experiencing higher levels of stress and an overwhelming sense of isolation, discontent and an unwillingness to adjust to this temporary complication.

I feel that Buddha would attribute these negative reactions to the presence and negative power of Dukkha within human nature. As Professor Grether explains in her Buddhist Dharma lecture, this high level of insatiability that many people experience creates a constant struggle to always be moving, striving to find happiness in anything or anywhere but one's current situation, and develops the inability for people to recognize comfort and contentment in their lives. Ultimately, I feel that this human trait is what has caused so much conflict and recent uprising against government influenced efforts to contain this virus and to keep the general public safe, that staying at home and slowing down the pace of life requires individuals to be too sedentary within their constant state and experience of Dukkha.

Stepping away from this more spiritual and philosophical concept of Dukkha, is the main tenet of Buddhism that encourages the effort to unlearn something every day (Grether, Buddhist Dharma). I feel that this mind opening experience has been required of every individual to some extent while living through this pandemic, but furthermore, is of utmost importance if we as individuals or as a country aspire to resurface from this challenge as victors or, better yet, as a new, kinder, more progress and empathy oriented society. To unlearn the norms that have created a highly selfish and capital driven

national and global population would be to restructure our entire state of mind, our driving essence, as Feuerbach stated, "what man loves is his soul" (The Christian Heaven, 179). This is the opportunity to not only redesign the collective soul of the world's populace, but to create norms of proactivity, brotherhood, and progress that uplift every individual soul existent on this planet.

While it appears to have been a negative potential outcome within Zoroastrian schema, I would like to include this quote in a positive light as a restructuring or even removal of societal roles that creates balance, appreciation, and progress for all individuals; just imagine, "the four classes will be mingled and merged; people not notable of their age, together with the lowly and insignificant, will be elevated to higher rank" (Foltz, P. 161 line 3). As this pandemic plays out, the often overlooked and even denigrated role of the primary sector of farming, mining, trucking and so on are finally being recognized for their crucial support of each and every person's life. These social changes could cause positive upheaval in every aspect of social classes, educational focus and the economic experience of future generations.

If the leadership of the world were to cultivate the ability to look both inward and outward to find, harness and align with the good of the Tao, the cosmic purpose (Grether, Taoism), of this pandemic, the physical, spiritual and mental suffering of individuals would not be in vain. As Sun Tzu attested in The Art of War, "no nation has ever benefited from prolonged war", it is the role of leadership to balance the value of resistance, the correct times to oblige others and to feel the flow of the Tao to serve not only the best interest of the people, but to recognize, embrace and to flourish from the purpose of both the good and bad of the experience. The changes in trade, international relations, employment conditions, quality control and various other vital aspects of individual and collective life that could arise from the proper acceptance and utilization of this pandemic experience could forever better the quality of life for all individuals.