

Religious Studies at Texas A&M University...

offers an interdisciplinary minor drawing on the research expertise of faculty members from across the College of Liberal Arts, including courses on ancient and modern religions, religious practices and literatures, methods in the study of religion, and social issues around religion. Current faculty research such topics as modern Jewish philosophy, digital religion, Hispanic and Latinx religion, American religious history, Islam, Hinduism, religion and the environment, and contemplative studies.

*Insights from scholars of religion at
Texas A&M University...*

RELIGION IN QUARANTINE



*The Future of Religion in a
Post-Pandemic World*

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Mediated Mindfulness, Inter-Religious Bonds, and Collective Healing: A Quarantine Diary

Srividya Ramasubramanian

Here, Srivi Ramasubramanian reflects on her spiritual journey through the lens of mediated mindfulness, interfaith solidarity, and community-based healing, as she teaches online guided meditation sessions during a pandemic.

In this brief essay, I reflect on my spiritual journey through my quarantine diary during the COVID-19 pandemic. I move through various phases of denial, worry, fear, peace, solidarity, betrayal, withdrawal, and finally, hope for new beginnings through oneness. Yoga, meditation, music, and art help me heal from the collective losses, trauma, and grief around me. Creating sanctuary safe spaces for peace and interconnectedness across people of multiple faiths, backgrounds, and perspectives is central to going beyond individual transformation for collective healing as a community, nation, and world. To do this, we need to build bonds of trust, mutual respect, solidarity, collaboration, and cooperation. We need to understand that all faith traditions speak the same truth of bliss and joy that comes from oneness.

Ignorance and Denial: Wildflowers, Shanti Choir, and Silent Retreat

Texas wildflowers are in bloom in early March in Texas where I am quarantined. The interfaith community choir that I cofounded, Brazos Valley Shanti Choir, meets from 4-5 PM. I have

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a hand sanitizer available next to the sign-in desk. Later, I shudder when I learn that more than 70 members of a choir in Seattle tested positive for coronavirus. My silent retreat is canceled. I decide to design my own. I unplug, disconnect, and relax. I read Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu, and Pema Chodron. I slow down, take naps, and go into deep rest.

Worry and Fear: Cancelations Galore, Uncertainty, and Worries

The first COVID-19 case in my county starts around mid-March. All kinds of cancelations and postponements are happening. My child's school will remain closed. My university closes in-person classes as we prepare for online teaching. My trip to San Diego for a conference and keynote is canceled. I worry a lot about the mental health of our students, about stressors within families, and domestic violence. I share about my favorite meditation app: Insight Timer – and why I like it. I send reminders several times to my social media friends to take deep breaths and practice daily meditations.

Peace and Solidarity: Interfaith Solidarity, Mediated Meditations, and Safe Spaces

At the end of March, I decide to launch a mediated meditation series during the pandemic. Many people show up from around the world – Malaysia, Ecuador, California, Texas, and elsewhere – for the meditation sessions. From all kinds of faith backgrounds, races, and genders. This is refreshing simply because there are so few online spaces for interfaith solidarity. Everyone is looking for some peace and ways to cope and grieve. I realize that it is important to create inclusive shared spaces for healing at the individual and collective levels. I decide it is important to have some shared agreements, clarify my intentions and methods, and create a mission statement. I say that “Mediated Meditations

with Srivi is meant to be a safe, affirming, inclusive, and supportive space for creating community through meditating together. We welcome people of all faiths, nationalities, races, occupations, genders, sexual orientations, faiths, age groups, political orientations, and abilities.”

The first week I offer meditations on panchakosha (five layers of existence), loving kindness meditation, shavasana, chakra/energy centers, and empty bowl. The second week's meditations focus on mantra (on oneness), full moon (on letting go), finding our joy, yoga nidra (deep relaxation/sleep), and the third eye (on clarity and focus). The third week I offer meditations on panchakosha, new beginnings, chakras/energy center, be the light, and mindfulness.

Betrayal and Withdrawal: Toxic Online Spaces and Emotional Labor of Diversity Work

By mid-April, the online space and community that I have created on social media does not feel like the same space anymore. There are tensions everywhere. I feel misunderstood, misrepresented, and hurt. I decide to get away from social media and coil myself into a shell. I am overwhelmed and feel unsupported. Those of us doing emotional care work are all drained. I wish friends would acknowledge, appreciate, and support our work. At least I wish they would not question, challenge, or hurt us or our work. I decide to conclude the daily meditation sessions.

Renewal and Hope: True Friendships, New Beginnings, and Art as Healing

It is early May now. Texas lifts its shelter-in-place even as the number of deaths continues to increase in the state. We are the first state to reopen. I reflect on the meaning of true friendship during crises. The good, bad, and the ugly – we see it all during a

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crisis. My reflections from this week center on intergroup solidarity. Crises teach us who our real friends are. True friendship means mutual respect, amplifying one another's voices, and standing up for one another. True friendship is about consistent solidarity rather than random acts of occasional charity.

Knowing the healing power of art, I decide to run an art-based fundraiser with my teenager's art prints. I also immerse myself into learning how to edit videos for YouTube. The creative process of working on this project brings me joy even though the learning is challenging. I create my first YouTube channel and guided meditation called "New Beginnings." I realize the key role that the meditation sessions had played in keeping me anchored and healthy.

I decide that it is time to offer guided meditations once again. But I don't think I have the energy to offer them every day like I did in April. It has to be once a week. We start "Mediated Meditations on Mondays in May" on May the 4th. May the force be with all of us during this challenging time of our lives.

Bliss and Wisdom: Yoga, Union of Mind-Body-Spirit, and Oneness

We are one. We are complete. We are that which we seek – that peace that love, that joy. *Sat-Chit-Ananda*: Truth-Wisdom-Bliss. *Om Shanti*.

Srividya Ramasubramanian (PhD, Penn State University) is a Presidential Impact Fellow and Professor of Communication at Texas A&M University. A scholar, musician, artist, yoga teacher, and poet, Ramasubramanian's scholarship focuses on diversity, inclusion, communication, feminism, social

justice, mindfulness, and holistic health. She has published research on mediated spirituality, spiritual transcendence, feminist leadership, positive media psychology, and everyday resilience. She is cofounder of the Brazos Valley Shanti Choir, a community choir for peace.