The University of Hartford Humanities Center Lecture Series for Spring 2018 focuses on the theme of “The Secular and the Spiritual,” developed and led by Dr. Richard Freund, Greenberg Professor of Jewish History and Chair of Judaic Studies (A&S).

Dr. Freund, four University of Hartford Humanities Center Faculty Fellows and three distinguished presenters will speak on Tuesday evenings at 7:30 p.m. between January 23 and April 17 in the Dana 201 (Mali 1) Lecture Hall (unless otherwise noted).

All lectures are free and open to the public.

The series explores the various ways in which spirituality is understood, portrayed, used, abused and shared in a 21st-century society that is diverse and both secularly-oriented and spiritual. Talks will be given by experts in the fields of religion, history, the visual arts, the performing arts, music, psychology, politics and the sciences.

The schedule for the series is as follows:

January 23 and 30: “The Roots of Modern Spirituality: The New Mystics (Baudelaire, Otto and Tillich)” by Dr. Richard Freund, Greenberg Professor of Jewish History. In these talks, Dr. Freund will discuss the origins of contemporary spirituality by examining the works of Charles Baudelaire, a nineteenth-century French poet, and Rudolph Otto and Paul Tillich, two twentieth-century theologians whose works deal with questions involving problems of human existence. Dr. Freund holds a PhD from the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and his research focuses on Jewish ethics and archaeology in both Israel and Europe.

February 6: “Hearing the Spiritual in Video Games” by Dr. Karen Cook, Assistant Professor of Music History at the University of Hartford and Humanities Center Faculty Fellow. This talk will address how certain video game soundtracks utilize pre-existing sacred music in order to designate a particular space, time period or world as spiritual. In the talk she will examine how the use of such music can however problematize this spiritual aspect and end up supporting racist, xenophobic and/or religiously intolerant worldviews. Dr. Cook holds a PhD in Musicology from Duke University and specializes in medieval and Renaissance music theory and performance. In addition to these areas, she maintains research in popular and contemporary music, including music and identity in television, film and video games.

February 13: “Love and Spirituality” by Dr. Deena Grant, Associate Professor of Jewish Studies at Hartford Seminary. Lecture will be in the Greenberg Center. Just in time for Valentine’s Day, Dr. Grant will discuss the intersection between love and spirituality in religious traditions. She received her PhD in Hebrew and Judaic Studies from New York University and teaches the Hebrew Bible from a historical-critical perspective as well as how it is interpreted and lived out by faith communities. Her book, Divine Anger in the Hebrew Bible (Catholic Biblical Association, 2014), explores varying expressions of God’s anger across major biblical collections.
February 20: “Art and Spirituality” by Siona Benjamin, Visual Artist. Lecture will be in Wilde Auditorium. Siona Benjamin grew up in Bombay and her work reflects her background of being raised Jewish in India. She is inspired by traditional styles of painting, like Indian and Persian miniatures, Byzantine icons, and Jewish and Christian illuminated manuscripts, which she blends with contemporary pop cultural elements to create a unique artistic vocabulary. She has an MFA in Painting and a second MFA in Theater Set Design, has been awarded two Fulbright Fellowships, and has exhibited in the US, Canada, Europe and Asia. Her website is: [http://www.artsiona.com](http://www.artsiona.com) and the trailer to *Blue Like Me*, a documentary on her work, can be found [here](http://www.artsiona.com).

February 27: “Dance and Spirituality” by Maria Sideri, Visual and Performance Artist. Lecture will be in Wilde Auditorium. Maria Sideri is a Greek artist based in London whose work focuses on movement, gesture and voice and is greatly influenced by her studies in dance and cultural anthropology. She has degrees in Classical Studies, Anthropology, and Creative Practice and has performed and exhibited her work, among other places, in England, Greece, the US and Belgium. Her website is: [http://www.mariasideri.co](http://www.mariasideri.co).

March 6, 13 and 27: “Eastern Religions in the West and the Western Religious Tradition Adaptations – The New Spirituality” by Dr. Richard Freund, Greenberg Professor of Jewish History at the University of Hartford. In this three-part lecture, Dr. Freund will discuss the use and integration of practices from Hinduism, Buddhism – Zen Buddhism in particular – in Western spiritual (and secular) life.

April 3: “Secularization and Failing Politics in Venezuela” by Dr. Marco Cupolo, Associate Professor of Hispanic Studies at the University of Hartford and Humanities Center Faculty Fellow. Dr. Cupolo’s talk will explore the ways in which Venezuelan strongman Hugo Chávez transformed the cult of Simón Bolívar, his country’s national hero, into a political religion for his supporters. Dr. Cupolo holds a PhD in Political Science from the University of Connecticut and has published widely on both Italian and Latin American studies.

April 10: “Does Spirituality Make Us Happier, Healthier and Nicer?” by Dr. Jack Powell, Professor of Psychology at the University of Hartford and Humanities Center Faculty Fellow. Dr. Powell’s talk will draw upon current psychological studies that examine how religion, spirituality and secularism are used to measure mental health, physical health and behavior. Dr. Powell has a PhD in Psychology from the University of Missouri and conducts research in the area of social psychology and its intersection with spirituality, morality and how individuals attempt to make meaning of the events in their lives.

April 17: “Science and the Secular Spirit” by Dr. Laurence Gould, Professor of Physics at the University of Hartford and Humanities Center Faculty Fellow. Dr. Gould will examine how a reason-based approach is fundamental to science as well as a guide to values. In the talk, he will argue that human-based moral principles cannot be rationally derived by an appeal to a religious base or from an emotional base, but rather from a scientific (observation- and evidence-based) approach. He holds a PhD from Temple University and his research focuses on computational physics, the philosophy of science, and quantum theory.

The Lecture Series on “The Secular and the Spiritual” in Spring 2018 is open to all students, faculty, and staff, as well as members of the community. Lectures begin at 7:30 p.m. in Dana 201 (Mali 1) Lecture Hall (unless otherwise noted) and are free and open to the general public. The Humanities Center at the University of Hartford supports interdisciplinary scholarship focusing on the humanities through arts, sciences, technology, media, music, psychology, history, film, philosophy and literature. For more information, contact Dr. Nicholas Ealy, Director, at ealy@hartford.edu or follow us on Facebook at “University of Hartford Humanities Center.”