

Knowing Body/Glowing Mind:

A Contemplatives Studies Approach to Buddhist Literature and the Western Mystic Gaze
RELI 333/573

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This course is an introduction to the developing field of contemplative studies and locates itself as part of the larger field of Cultural Studies. In this course we look at a variety of Buddhist and other traditions, especially Hindu, Sufi, and Gnostic, with an eye and ear to their contemplative traditions as expressed in art, literature, theology, and theory. Our course is divided into three sections.

WHAT IS CONTEMPLATIVE STUDIES ANYWAY?

By way of introduction, we reflect on what it means to do contemplative studies in the Academy. What is the relationship between contemplative practice, mysticism, between contemplative practice and religion, between contemplative practice and scholarship? Between contemplative practice and the rest of life, if there is any such thing

A crucial part of contemplative studies is the way it values first person, subjective reflection. In this it differs greatly from the “objective” methods of science and formal Western philosophy. What is gained, and what are the risks, of engaging the first person as a source of knowledge?

As a method, contemplative studies finds the student engaged in meditation as well as in analysis and appreciation of religious writing, art, and ritual from the perspective of how these interact with contemplation. Contemplative practices and the way in which religious texts, culture, or art support these, have their own logic. This logic is related with, but most definitely distinct from the logic of philosophy, literary interpretation or psychology. As participant-observers, we are interested in the intersection of contemplative practice, epistemology, soteriology, and the visual and other meditative arts. The first section of our course is an overview of developments in the newly emergent field of contemplative studies over the last few years at, for example, Brown and Emory.

BUDDHISM

Steve Beyer famously observed that Buddhism is a performing art. Its ritual arts, music and chant, scroll painting, sculpture, and ornate printing methods are all linked by their participation in contemplative practice. Our readings in Buddhism during this section of the course will introduce us to one particular trajectory of contemplative learning. To gain insight into this, in the method of contemplative studies, assumes some

contemplative discipline on the part of the student/researcher. An underlying thesis of this course is that a contemplative studies approach to religious material provides a creative and intellectually useful method for confronting the complexities of today's interreligious multi-perspectival world.

You are encouraged to maintain a minimum ten-minute per day practice throughout the semester. In addition we will have the first of two "meditation projects" during the course with specific instructions for you, including journaling.

The use of contemplative practice in conjunction with the study of any tradition raises questions of gaze, objectivity, and subjective positioning, all of which are crucial to important contemplative practice as well as to the theorizing of such practices and the conceptualization of "religion."

PSYCHOLOGICAL INSIGHT AND CONTEMPLATIVE AWARENESS

In addition to distinguishing contemplative perspectives and processes from psychological ones, we need to inquire into the relationship, and possible differences, between psychology, contemplation, and mysticism.

Today, there is a new exploration of consciousness through the science of the brain. Neuroscience is taking a keen interest in exploring and understanding how meditation changes the brain, shows up in neurological functioning. But the brain's activity is not something we can normally experience. How does this scientific interest tally with the contemplative's emphasis on subjective experience? Can these two languages speak to each other?

In this section we especially look at the work of H.J. Almaas who has developed a richly detailed path of spiritual growth known as the Diamond Approach. We will touch on key elements of his perspective, and introduce his the main method of the Diamond Approach, a contemplative process of inquiry. Exploration of this will constitute our second "meditation project."

THE SACRED & THE GROOVY: HETERO/ORTHODOXY and the Mind.

We start with the premise that not all mysticism is contemplative, and not all contemplative practice is mystical, and either of these may, or may not, yield psychological insight. When and how they come together is part of our inquiry. What is the relationship between "mystical experience" and spiritual growth or psychological development? In particular we will juxtapose contemporary "unchurched" expressions of mysticism with the traditional Buddhist and contemplatively grounded D

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READINGS

From the perspective of contemplative studies, to read religious literature of simply as a set of philosophical propositions, or as pieces of literature, is insufficient. Such writing must also be analyzed in terms of its impact on the deep inner space of contemplative practice.

Our readings include meditation instructions, poetic and “literature” broadly construed, philosophy/epistemology, and psychology, and we look these in terms of contemplative studies:

The following guiding question help us hold these different readings as a coherent whole: How do these four genres of literature approach the following issues central to many contemplative practices:

1. Identification of self or soul or being/selflessness
2. relationship of self to other, to world
3. relationship of mind to body, and of direct experience to intellectual knowing
4. contemplative encounters of redemption, liberation, bliss
5. what’s love got to do with it?
6. how do we factor in background cultural assumptions

REQUIRED READING

Alan Wallace *The Taboo of Subjectivity*

Rumi *The Essential Rumi*

Sangpo, Khetsun Rinpoche *Tantric Practice in Nyingma*

Thera, Nyanaponika, *Heart of Buddhist Meditation*

Pema Chodren *Start Where You Are*

A.H. Almaas *Space Cruiser Inquiry*

Elaine Pagels *Beyond Belief*

Segal, Daniel *The Mindful Brain*

Wangyal, *Healing with Form and Light*

Articles/chapters on Owlspace

A.H. Almaas from *Diamond Heart Series Book Three* “The Flame of the Search” 1-16

A.H. Almaas *DH3* “Who Am I” 17-34

Aronson, Harvey *Buddhist Practice on Western Ground* Chapter V “Local and Express” 41-52p Chapter XV, “Practice, Performance, and Finding our Voices” 199-210;

Epilogue; Life as Pilgrimage, 211-212

Fuller, Robert *The Americans and the Unconscious* selected chapters

Klein, “Persons then and Now” in *Meeting the Great Bliss Queen* Chapter II. (PDF)

Kripal Jeffrey *Roads of Excess, Palaces of Wisdom* selected chapters.

Griffiths Paul, *Religious Reading*

Ghent, Emmanuel “Masochism, Submission, Surrender”

Maharsi Ramana *The Teachings of Ramana Maharsi* selected chapters

Selected articles from Teachers College Record Vol 108 number 9, September 2006.
Parsons, William *Psychoanalysis and Spirituality*

RECOMMENDED READING: ** in bookstore

BUDDHISM:

Gyatso, Tenzin, HH Dalai Lama XIV, *Dzogchen*

Gyatso, Janet *Apparitions of Self*

Jamgon Kongtrul, *The Great Path of Awakening* . tr. Ken McLeod

Cozort, Daniel *Highest Yoga Tantra*

HH Dalai Lama, "Six Deities" from the *Yoga of Tibet* (can xerox/PDF)

Klein, *Meeting the Great Bliss Queen* Chapter II. (PDF)

**Kongrul, *Creation and Completion*

Jason Skiff, "Understanding the Meditative Process" in *Insight Journal*, 24-27

**Patrul Rinopche, *Words of My Perfect Teacher*

PSYCHOLOGY:

Parsons, William *The Enigma of the Oceanic Feeling*

Parsons, William "Historical Developments in Unchurched Mysticism" (available on request)

Perth, Candace *Molecules of Emotion*—last chapter especially

Winnicott, Donald "The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment" 140-157 (available on request)

THE SACRED AND THE GROOVEY: Ortho/ Hetero/doxy

Bell, Catherine, *Ritual*

Forman, Robert K.C., *The Problem of Pure Consciousness*, "Non-Linguistic Meditation" and "Of Horses and Horse Carts"

Forman, Robert, K.C., *Mysticism, Mind, Consciousness: Mysticism, Constructivism and Forgetting*

Hadot, Pierre, *Philosophy as Way of Life*. (pp. 1-46; 79-126) (available to Xerox)

Kripal Jeffrey, *Roads of Excess, Palaces of Wisdom*

Pagels, Elaine, *The Gnostic Gospels*

Shankara, *Vakyavrtti* "Commentary on the Profound Phrase THOU ART THAT: 1-38 (in Library)

McGinn, Bernard *The Foundations of Mysticism*

Laura I. Rendon, "Academics of the Heart" *The Review of Higher Education*.

Taylor, Charles "In Interiore Homine" from *Sources of the Self* 127-142

Taylor, from *Sources of the Self* "Inner Nature" 185-197

Hatab, "Introduction" to *Myth and Philosophy: A Contest of Truths* 1-16

Hatab, "Phenomenological Analysis of Myth" 17-45 in *Myth and Philosophy*

**Available in Bookstore

All texts available in Fondren (not on reserve)

Enrollment limited and by consent of instructor. Prior background assumed.

REQUIREMENTS!

1. Absolutely regular attendance. Inform instructor of any circumstances beyond your control. More than two absences will likely require you to withdraw from the course.
2. Keep up with and be prepared to discuss the reading each class.
3. Regular contemplative practice of 10-15 minutes *on a daily basis*. We will discuss this further.
4. Two “Contemplative Projects”: Experimenting with specific types of contemplative practice; journaling and juxtaposing this with readings.
5. UNDERGRADUATES: 5-7 page mid-term paper & 10-12 pp final paper. One class report of 10 minutes, drawing from class readings.
6. GRADUATES: Two oral reports—at least one drawing from recommended or self-selected material not covered in class. 8-10 page Midterm paper and 15-18 page final paper.
(No final exam for anyone)

DIALOGICAL DISCUSSION: The reading assignments are often set up on “parallel tracks” allowing us to juxtapose different perspectives. For example, reading about “Religious Reading” gives us material to compare and contrast with discussions of mindfulness; the Shamanic and Buddhist practices we read about can be contrasted with the Diamond Approach or “Groovey” contemplative practices. Students will contribute to this dialogue through scheduled reports in which you highlight a particular reading’s contribution to (or confusion) of a select theme.

Special Concerns. Any student with a disability requiring accommodations in this course is encouraged to contact me after class or during office hours. Students will need also to contact Disability Support Services in the Ley Student Center.

Readings draw from the following. Most required Readings will be on electronic reserve ; all are also available for xeroxing in the Religious Studies Office at five cents a copy. Books are ordered in the bookstore.

I highly recommended that you print/copy ALL materials on three-hole punch and place them in a loose-leaf notebook for easy reference. You will want to bring current readings to class with you to further in-depth reflection.

WHAT IS CONTEMPLATIVE STUDIES

Wed. Jan 9 A. INTRODUCTION—Class Orientation ; hand out readings.

Wed. Jan 16: CONTEMPLATIVE STUDIES & SUBJECTIVITY

Article(s) from *The Teacher's Record* Vol. 108 No. 9 September 2006
Laura Rendon "Academics of the Heart"

JAN 23 MORE ON SUBJECTIVITY

Wallace, Alan *The Taboo of Subjectivity*

BUDDHISM

JAN 30 MINDFULNESS

Heart of Buddhist Meditation Intro 7-15

Foundations of Mindfulness Sutra 117-120

Heart of Buddhist Meditation Chpt I. "The Way of Mindfulness" 19-29.

Contemplative Project I Begins

Feb 6 BEGINNING A PATH

Tantric practice in Nyingma "Motivation" & "Listening to Instructions" 13-44

Mindfulness and Clear Comprehension" pp. 30-35

Griffiths, *Religious Reading*, 3-10; 40-54

No Escape, Wisdom of No Escape pp. 3-21

Rec: Jason Skiff, "Understanding the Meditative Process" in *Insight Journal*, 24-27

Feb 13 CONTINUING THE PATH: FOUR THOUGHTS

Tantric Practice, 45-100.

No Escape 22-43

Rumi Poems "Two Ways of Running" 178-180

REC: *Words of My Perfect Teacher* 39-141

REC: Hatab, "Introduction" to *Myth and Philosophy* 1-16

Hand in Contemnplative Project I

Feb 20 HEART : REFUGE AND COMPASSION

Tantric Practice "'Refuge" and "Mind of Enlightenment" 113-140

No Escape 44-69

Rumi, "Cry Out" 156-167 and "The Debtor Sheikh" 156-158

REC: Corresponding Chapters in *Words*

Feb 27 EMBODIMENT: THE LANGUAGE OF ENERGY

Tantric Practice "Vajrasattva" 141-153

No Escape 70-91

Wangyal, *Healing* 1-32

Rumi, "Moses and the Shepherd" 165-168

REC: *Words* 297-307; Perth, "Truth" in *Molecules*

MID –TERM PAPER DUE * MARCH 12

PSYCHOLOGICAL VIEWS AND THE DIAMOND APPROACH

March 12 LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS: The Emergence of unchurched psychologized mysticism and conversations between psychoanalysis and spirituality.

Readings: Parsons, William *Psychoanalysis and Spirituality*

Rec: Fuller, Robert selected chapters from *Americans and the Unconscious*

March 19 March 26th INTRODUCING THE DIAMOND HEART

Almas, *Diamond Heart* "The Flame of the Search" 1-16 How about the other two Almas articles?

Rumi: "The Question" 97-98 and "Joy at Sudden Disappointment" 168-169

March 26th Diamond Heart Part Two

READINGS FROM SPACECRUISER

Rec: Ramana Maharsi Selected chapters

April 2nd Either do: From Mesmer to Transpersonal Psychology: The American Sacralization of the Unconscious

Reading: Selected Chapters from Fuller

Rec: Ghent, *Masochism, Submission and Surrender*

OR; The Mindful Brain: Neuroscience, psychology and Buddhism

THE SACRED AND THE GROOVEY

Apr 9 EARLY CHRISTIANITY: TWO LANGUAGES

Pagels, *Beyond Belief: The Gospel of Saint Thomas* 1-113

Rumi: "Breadmaking" 183-185; "Jesus on the Lean Donkey" 202-203 "What Jesus Ran Away From 204.

Rumi Poems "Two Ways of Running" 178-180 (again)

REC: Charles Taylor, "God Loveth Advertbs" in *Sources of the Self* 211- 233

Apr 16 MODERN/ANCIENT MYSTICS/WHAT IS BELOVED

Kripal , *Roads of Excess*- Chapter??
Rumi, "The Chinese Princess" 233-237
Rumi "The Body's Intelligenece" p.151-153
Rumi "Solomon Poems" 186-181;

FINAL PAPER DUE BY FINAL EXAM DATE.

Apr 23 (No class, "Friday")