

YOGIS, MYSTICS, MONKS, AND ZEN MASTERS

Professor James S. Cutsinger

It is sometimes said that the religions of the world are like different paths up the same mountain or different colors of the spectrum, or like the various dialects of a single language.

At first glance such claims appear to be contradicted by the fact that these traditions often diverge quite radically in what they say about the nature of God, the means of salvation, and what happens after death. Nonetheless there are those who contend that beneath these important, doctrinal differences one can discern an inward or esoteric core of common spiritual Truth, unanimously attested to by sages and spiritual masters of both East and West.

The aim of this seminar is to test this contested proposition by carefully examining the doctrines and contemplative methods of four important spiritual traditions: Yoga (Hinduism), Zen (Buddhism), Hesychasm (Christianity), and Sufism (Islam). In each case students will be introduced to classic sources and key historical figures as well as to the teachings of modern and contemporary spokesmen.

Method

The seminar will be conducted as a Socratic discussion. Each class begins with a question, or questions, concerning the assigned reading for the day, and students will be expected to join in a shared conversational inquiry. While it is sometimes thought that Socratic conversation is less rigorous than a more didactic and professorial style, its rigor is simply of another kind. In the serious cross-examination of a text, the trajectory of thought is often unpredictable; it is certainly less linear than that of the lecture hall. But the intellectual commitment required—the daily vigilance—demands a preparation and yields a mental fitness not promoted by other forms of learning. These advantages will be pressed to the full in this course.

Requirements

1. *Reading.* In keeping with Socrates' observation that "it is better to deal thoroughly with a little than unsatisfactorily with a lot" (*Theaetetus*, 187e), reading assignments are relatively short. Students are expected to study the assigned material very closely and carefully; underlining key words and passages and maintaining a dialogue with the authors through copious marginal comments are essential preparations for class discussion.

2. *Attendance,* both prompt and regular. Two unexcused absences are permitted; a penalty of one letter grade is imposed for each additional unexcused absence. And attendance means punctuality; tardy arrivals and seminars are a disastrous mix.

3. *Constructive participation.* For obvious reasons, this course is not for students who prefer an education they can simply ingest as the passive takers of notes. It is for those who enjoy the acts of thinking and reflection and argument. Frequent contributions to class discussion are not merely desirable; they are essential. One-third of the final course grade will be based on class participation.

4. *Essays.* Students will write three papers of 5-6 pages each. Neither book-reports nor research-papers, these essays should be viewed instead as continuing conversations, in which their authors wrestle in writing with the ideas opened up by at least three of the religious traditions. (Basing a paper or papers on more than one religion is perfectly acceptable.) Professor Cutsinger's *Breviary of English Usage*, which can be found on his website under "Teaching", will be used in his grading and commentary. Grades received on the two best essays will be used in calculating the final course grade (one-third each).

READINGS

Yoga: Hindu Path to Union

Mircea Eliade, “Yogic Doctrine and Technique”

Patanjali, “Yoga Sutras”

Svatmarama Yogendra, “Hatha Yoga Pradipika”, Chapter I

Hesychasm: The Spirituality of the Christian East

Philip Sherrard, “The Renewal of Contemplative Spirituality”

James S. Cutsinger, “The Yoga of Hesychasm”

Maximos the Confessor, “Scriptural Ascent”

Gregory Palamas, “Defense of the Holy Hesychasts”

Kallistos Ware, “The Power of the Name”

James S. Cutsinger, “*Hesychia* and the Jesus Prayer”

Dumitru Staniloae, “Experiential Apophaticism”

Theodulus Varzare, “Bishop John the Desert-Dweller”

Yoga: Hindu Path to Union (continued)

Svatmarama Yogendra, “Hatha Yoga Pradipika”, Chapter II

Zen: Buddhism “Outside the Scriptures”

Alan Watts, “Empty and Marvelous”

Wumen Huikai, “A Cluster of *Koans*”

Dogen, “Treasury of the True *Dharma* Eye”

Hakuun Yasutani, “Introduction to *Zazen*”

Kakuan Shien, “The Ten Ox-Herding Pictures”

Shunryu Suzuki, “Informal Talks on Zen”

Yoga: Hindu Path to Union (continued)

Svatmarama Yogendra, “Hatha Yoga Pradipika”, Chapter III

Sufism: Islamic Mysticism

Martin Lings, “The Tidal Wave”

Jalal al-Din Rumi, “Stories and Poems”

Marcel Carret, “Shaykh Ahmad al-Alawi”

Titus Burckhardt, “Three Aspects of the Way”

Ibn ata Allah Al-Iskandari, “The Key to Salvation”

Isa Nur al-Din, “Spiritual Texts”

Yoga: Hindu Path to Union (concluded)

Svatmarama Yogendra, “Hatha Yoga Pradipika”, Chapter IV