Meditation in Indian Culture

This course probes the truths behind traditional claims of the priority of internal practice in Indian traditions. We will examine both the practices themselves -- techniques of meditation and contemplation, religious ways of using intellect, forms of chant and ritual -- and the reverberations of these practices in philosophical reflection, socioreligious institutions, and expressive arts.

In order to get a sense of the experience treated in classical religious texts, you will be expected to work with some basic meditation practices. This practical work may be thought of as a “laboratory requirement” in which you “experiment” with different practices, note the results, and reflect on them. As in other courses with labs, you should count on spending a few hours per week on these experiments.

At least as important for the work of the course (and much more important for the grade) will be the ways in which you situate these practices within larger South Asian world views as suggested by doctrines, rituals, iconic forms, and literary texts. To keep the interaction between internal practice and broader world views central, we will examine both Hindu and Buddhist sources, consistently examining the ways in which similar practices are given distinct shapes by the two religious traditions.

The written work will consist of three short papers on assigned topics; a journal of your practice; and a final short paper that may draw on the journal. The journal should minimally be a “log book,” in which you note the type of practice you are doing and record the time. You will probably find it helpful for your final paper, however, if you describe your experiments and their results more fully and record your thoughts about them along the way: the final writing for the course will be a general consideration of your practice as recorded in the journal in relation to cultural contexts and/or your own life experience. Final papers will due on the first full day of the exam period, May 13. In addition, journals will be reviewed (but not graded) twice during the semester.

Please keep your journal in a compact physical form. If you think you might want to preserve your journal for a personal record, it’s fine to use a small spiral notebook or composition book. If you’re not so concerned about your journal’s appearance, stapled notebook pages or computer print-out would be appreciated—they’re easier to carry. Full-sized spiral notebooks or binders are generally not necessary and are cumbersome to manage in a large class. Please don’t use them.

Class attendance and participation will be considered in determining the final grade. Regular attendance is expected, so very poor attendance is likely to result in a very poor grade.
The readings for the course will be drawn from:

Corless, *The Vision of Buddhism*
Hanh, *Transformation & Healing: The Sutra on the Four Establishments of Mindfulness*
Landaw and Weber, *Images of Enlightenment: Tibetan Art in Practice*
McDonald, *How to Meditate: A Practical Guide*
Ramana Maharishi, *Spiritual Teachings*
Shattuck, *Hinduism*
Vivekananda, *Raja-Yoga*

All of these books have been ordered by the Campus bookstore and are on reserve in Uris library. (Shattuck’s *Hinduism* is also available as an e-book through the Cornell Library system; check the catalogue.) There will also be a few short readings accessible online, distributed in class, or available on blackboard.

### Schedule

**Week 1: Introductory**

- **January 25** Mon.— Meditation in Indian Culture and in this Course
  
  *Vivekananda, Raja Yoga: Introduction (ch. 1)*

- **Jan. 27** Wed.— Two Views of a Similar World
  
  *McDonald: 3-33 Transformation and Healing, pp. 7-11, Introduction”*

- **Jan. 29** Fri.— Insight in Buddhism
  
  *Corless, pp. 1-26 (Parts 1 and 2); 287-285 (Appendix, the Story of the Dharma)*
  
  *Satipatthana Sutta text only, first reading (Transformation and Healing, pp. 13-29)*
  
  *Practice: McDonald, pp.37-41 “Meditation on the Breath”*

**Week 2: Buddhist Persons**

- **Feb 1** Mon.— Buddhas and Humans
  
  *Corless, part 3, chs. 1-3*
  
  *Transformation and Healing, pp. 31-43 (through exercise 6).*
  
  *Practice suggestion: Transformation and Healing, fifth and sixth exercises, pp. 41-43*

- **Feb 3** Wed.— Selfless Persons
  
  *Corless, ch. 4*
  
  *Transformation and Healing, pp. 43-56; 103-13, “Principles for the Practice of Mindfulness”*
  
  *Practice: McDonald, pp. 65-68, “Impermanence”*

- **Feb 5** Fri.— Monastic Disciplines
  
  *Transformation and Healing, pp.57-102 (the rest of the exercises)*
  
  *Practice suggestion: McDonald, pp.42-44, “Clarity of Mind”*
Week 3: Hindu Persons
Feb. 8 Mon.— The Yoga Sutras – Guest Lecture, Prof. Dan Boucher
   Vivekananda, Raja Yoga, pp. 22-93
Feb. 10 Wed.— Doing the Eight-Limbed Yoga
   Vivekananda, Raja Yoga, pp. 94-182
   Practice: Pranayama exercise in ch. V, first phase only (measured breathing, p. 60)
   Practice suggestion: Pranayama exercise in ch. V, further phases, pp. 60-62
Feb. 12 Fri.— Yogic Psychology and Goals
   Vivekananda, Raja Yoga, pp. 183 to 221
   Practice: Dharana exercise from Vivekananda, pp. 69-70; focus on the heart

Week 4: Hindu Worlds
Feb. 15 Mon.— Hierarchical Orders
   Shattuck, ch. 1
Feb. 17 Wed.— Film: Wages of Action
Feb. 19 Fri.— Liberation in the Bounded World
   Katha Upanishad, online resource: http://www.naiveinspirations.com/?page_id=5

Week 5: Buddhist Worlds
Feb. 22 Mon.— Theravada Metaphysics
   Corless, ch. 5
   Practice: McDonald, pp. 45-48, "Continuity of Mind"
Feb. 24 Wed.— Theravada Cosmology
   Corless, ch. 6, including appendix on pp. 155-63
   Practice suggestion: Transformation and Healing, pp. 54-55 “Interdependence of Body and Universe
—Submit journals for review today—
   Paper #1 assigned -- The Person in the World
Feb. 26 Fri.— Film: Footsteps of the Buddha

Week 6: Mantra, Text, Story
March 1 Mon.— Sound and Ritual in the Veda
   Practice: regular breathing with “soham”
   Tigunait, Mantra and Initiation (passage on soham, on Blackboard)
March 3 Wed.— Film: Altar of Fire
   Shattuck, ch. 2
   Paper #1 due today
March 5 Fri.— Ram as Mantra, Story, and Text
   Shattuck, ch. 3
   Practice suggestion: Ram mantra

Week 7: Intellect and Feeling, Hindu
March 8 Mon. — Vedantic Traditions
   Isha Upanishad (entire) and Part 6 of Chhandogya Upanishad (web links on blackboard)
   Practice suggestion: first reflect carefully on “soham” in light of Upanishadic passages; then try breathing with soham
March 10 Wed. — Advaita Traditions  
Ramana Maharshi, pp. 1-38  
*Practice*: Inquire “Who am I?” in light of Ramana Maharshi’s writing

March 12 — Friday  
Modes of Devotion and Devotional Philosophies  
Ramana Maharshi, pp. 39-107

**Week 8: Intellect and Feeling, Buddhist**

March 15 Mon. — Compassion  
Corless, 7-8  
*Practice*: McDonald, pp. 106-103, “Equanimity”

March 17 Wed. — Emptiness  
Corless, chs. 9-10  
selection from Nagarjuna, Madhamikakarikas on Blackboard  
*Practice suggestion*: McDonald, pp. 53-58 “Emptiness”

March 19 Fri. — Discussion/meditation (small group expected!)

---Spring Break---

**Week 9: Compassionate Beings**

March 29 Mon. — Vajrayana Traditions  
Landaw, chs. Landaw, ch. 2-3 (ch. 1 optional)  
*Practice*: McDonald, pp. 116-121 “Compassion and Tonglen”

March 31 Wed. — Buddhist Beings  
Begin Landaw, chs. 4-6  
*Practice*: McDonald, pp. 186-93, "The Buddha"

April 2 Fri. — Video on tangka painting  
Continue with Landaw

**Week 10: Imagination and Art in Vajrayana (finish Landaw)**

April 5 Mon. — Visualizing the Bodhisattva  
McDonald, pp. 110-113  
*Practice*: McDonald, pp. 155-60 (Avalokiteshwara)

April 7 Wed. — Iconic Conventions  
Finish Landaw through ch. 7  
—Submit journals for review today—  
**Paper 2 assigned—Convention and Experience**

April 9 Fri. — The Image of Tara  
readings from In Praise of Tara (on Blackboard)  
*Practice*: McDonald, 211-18
Week 11: The Divine with Form in Hinduism
April 12 Mon.— Yantra, Mantra, Divinity
      Practice suggestion: Meditate on Sri Yantra, Shattuck, p. 54; imagine it as power
April 14 Wed. — Seeing the Divine in Hindu Tradition
      Readings from Huyler Meeting God (on Blackboard)
      Practice: “Sivo ham” mantra, in light of Shiva images
Paper #2 due today
April 16 Fri. — Video: Loving Krishna

Week 12: Expressions 1: Devotional Poetry, Ecstasy, and Mythic Meaning
April 19 Mon.— The Worship of Krishna
      O’Flaherty, Sources for the Study of Hinduism, pp. 142-48 (on blackboard)
      Practice suggestion: Imagine Krishna as child, friend, or lover
April 21 Wed.— Devotional Shaivism
      Practice suggestion: continue with "Sivo ham" in light of verse
      Peterson, Hymns of the Tamil Saints (on blackboard)
April 23 Fri.— Devotion to the Formless Lord
      O’Flaherty, Sources for the Study of Hinduism, pp. 139-42 (on blackboard)

Week 13: Expressions 2: Ritual and Dance
April 26 Mon.— Performance Traditions
      Practice suggestion: Experiment with mudras
April 28 Wed.— Everyday Worship
      Shattuck, ch. 4
      Paper #3 assigned -- Convention and Experience
April 30 Fri.— Video: Given to Dance (Temple Dance and Society)

Week 14: Expressions 3: Contemporary Transformations
May 3 Mon.— Musical traditions
      Shattuck, ch. 5
May 5 Wed.— Spiritual teachers in the West
      Paper #3 due today
      Format for final paper distributed
May 7 Fri.— Slope Day. Class will be held anyway: final intimate session for the faithful.

Final paper due on Thursday, May 13, in the Asian Studies Office, 350 Rockefeller.