Indian Meditation Texts

Because texts that record visionary experience, prescribe contemplation practice, or present enigmatic utterances are highly valued in Indian tradition, they need to be taken seriously by students of Indian -- and world -- civilization. This course aims to provide an introduction to ways of understanding meditation texts in their diverse Indian and world contexts.

We begin with classical approaches from Hindu and Buddhist tradition together with some of their modern variants. After the break, we start looking at South Asian Sufi traditions in addition to Hindu and Buddhist paths, focusing on the ways in which perceptions of the body enter into meditation practice. The course concludes with an exploration of Indian devotional songs and the ways in which the meditative states they reference seem to be enhanced by musical performance.

Course requirements include:
1. three four-page papers on assigned questions designed to help you think about the readings in each of the first three sections of the course;
2. a concluding paper that incorporates the last section’s readings, due at the beginning of finals week;
3. regular informal class presentations on the day’s assignments.

• Remember, the course is a discussion-based seminar. Attendance and course participation will definitely be considered in determining the final grade.

The following books have been ordered at the Campus Store. Some may be available much more inexpensively online; they have also been put on reserve in Uris library:

• Patrick Olivelle, Upanisads, Oxford University Press, USA
• Ramana Maharshi, Talks With Ramana Maharshi: On Realizing Abiding Peace and Happiness; Inner Directions; 2nd edition
• Sarah Shaw, Buddhist Meditation: An Anthology of Texts from the Pali Canon; Routledge
• Śāntideva, The Bodhicaryāvatāra: A New Translation by Kate Crosby and Andrew Skilton, Oxford
• Thubten Dondrub, Spiritual Friends, Wisdom Publications
• Brian Dana Aker, trans. Hatha Yoga Pradipika, YogaVidya.com
• Lilian Silburn, Kundalini: Energy of the Depths, State University of New York Press
• Glenn H. Mullin The Practice of the Six Yogas of Naropa; Snow Lion Publications; 2nd edition
• Constantina, Bailly Shaiva Devotional Songs of Kashmir, State University of New York Press
• Scott Kugle with Carl Ernst, trans. Sufi Meditation and Contemplation: Timeless Wisdom from Mughal India, Suluk Press, Omega Publications
Course Syllabus

Th Aug 23 Introduction -- Translating Experience from Ancient India

Vision, Concentration, and Reflection

Hindu Traditions

Week 1—Upanishads
Tu 28 The Great Forest
   Olivelle. Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad
   rec: Olivelle, introduction, esp. from p. xlix
Th 30 Shorter Upanishads
   Olivelle, pp. 177-290; (Upanishads for specific focus will have been assigned to students at the previous class session.)

Week 2—Yoga Sutras
Tu Sept 4 Meditative Absorption
   Bryant, intro, pp. xxxv-lxvii; chapter 1 (in the chapter, pay attention to the sutras themselves and read as much of the commentaries as you need to understand them)
   recommended, intro pp. xvii-xxxiv
Th Sept 6 Practice, Powers, and Absolute Independence
   chs. 3, 4, and 5 (again, with particular attention to the sutras themselves)

Week 3—Ramana Maharshi’s Advaita
Tu Sept 11 Advaita, Gurus, and Ramana Maharshi
   Ramana Maharshi, xxi-xxii, ch. 1
   •Paper 1 assigned
Th Sept 13 Discourse as Method
   Ramana Maharshi, chs 2-5; students should each focus on a different chapter

Buddhist Traditions

Week 4—The Pali Canon
Tu Sept 18 Practicing in the Theravada Style
   Shaw, pp. 1-85
   •Paper 1 due
Th Sept 20 The Effects of Theravada Meditations
   Shaw, pp. 86-198
Week 5—The Bodhisattva Way
Tu Sept 25  Practicing Virtue
Śāntideva, Introductions and pp. 1-74
Th Sept 27  Meditation and Wisdom
Śāntideva, pp. 75-143

Week 6—Tibetan-Style Visions and Reflections
Oct 2  Vajrayana Reflections
Spiritual Friends, pp. 1-84
• Paper 2 assigned
Oct 4  Vajrayana Visualizations
from Vajrasattva visualization and commentary on Blackboard

The Body in Meditation Practice
Week 7—Hatha Yoga
Oct 9  Fall break
Oct 11  Focusing on the Physical Body
Akers, trans. Hatha Yoga Pradipika, entire
• Paper 2 due

Week 8—Kundalini
Oct 16  Subtle and Physical Bodies
Silburn, parts I and II
Oct 18  Esoteric Meanings
Silburn, part III

Week 9—Buddhist Yogas
Oct 23  Preliminaries
Mullin, pp. 7-91
Oct 25  Practices
Mullin, pp. 95-153

Week 10—South Asian Sufi Traditions
Oct 30  The Alms Bowl of Shaikh Kalimullah
Kugle, pp. 1-121
Nov 1  The Compass of Truth and the Treatise on the Human Body
Kugle, pp. 125-193

Contemplative Practice in Devotional Song

Week 11—Kashmiri Shaivism
Nov 6  Devotion, Yoga, and Reflection
Bailly, entire
Nov 8  Lalla
extracts from Lalla, on Blackboard
Week 12—Later Hindu Devotion
   Nov 13 To the Divine Mother
       extracts on the Divine Mother, on Blackboard
   Nov 15 To Krishna
       extracts to Krishna, on Blackboard

Week 14—Sufi Traditions
   Nov 20 Qawwali
       Wolf, “Poetics of Sufi Practice” and Qawwali texts on Blackboard
   Nov 22
       Thanksgiving

Week 15—Kabir
   Nov 27 Texts in Their Contexts
       extracts on Blackboard
   Nov 29 Musical Performance
       extracts on Blackboard