



MEDITATION AND SELF-KNOWLEDGE

Spring 2014, Prof. Lubin
MTWR 10¹⁰–12¹⁰ + field trips

“Here are the roots of trees. Here are empty places. Get down and meditate. Don't be lazy. Don't become one who is later remorseful. This is my instruction to you.”

~ [Bhikkhunupassaya Sutta](#)

“Stability itself is nothing but a more languid motion. ... I do not portray being; I portray passing.”

~ Michel de Montaigne

COURSE DESCRIPTION

For 2500 years, Hindus and Buddhists have promoted meditation as a means to realize attain insight and liberation from suffering, a state sometimes understood in terms of divinity or Buddha-nature. Meditation has also been adopted during by some in the West over the last century, often for psychological or physical benefits apart from any devotional context. What had traditionally been a practice for ordained monks was popularized in the West, a trend that then caught on in Asia as well. We look at the origins of meditative practices in Asian traditions, using primary sources, social context, and personal experience of basic meditative techniques. The course concludes by noting that some contemporary neuroscientists are looking to meditation to better understand mind, brain, emotion, and cognition.

COURSEWORK AND GRADING

As in most seminars, work for the course includes reading, applied thought, discussion, and writing. In addition, this seminar entails **meditation**, both guided (in class) and independent (twice per day, for a minimum of at least 10–15 minutes each time. We use very basic techniques explained and discussed in class. The aim in this is simply to make a personal experiment of the techniques and to reflect on the mental and physical subjective experience, recognizing that our experiences may differ from the experiences of those trained within the traditions studied, or those practicing them from an attitude of religious faith.

Nevertheless, one aim of the class is to practice some basic techniques of mental and physical discipline, and to use them to “observe our selves.” Students should keep a **meditation journal** to record their reflections on meditative experience. (This is not graded work.)

Apart from the journal, students are expected to participate in the class **on-line discussion via Sakai** each week. These contributions should address the reading and class discussions, and may draw on relevant reflections from personal practice. The Sakai discussions provide an opportunity for informal expression, but the contributions should be carefully thought out and carefully expressed. Students may also be asked to respond to and interpret individual passages from the readings. Together, the responses and contributions in seminar will count for 1/3 of the final grade.

We will have three to four required **field trips** to hear teachers from particular traditions and to meditate with them: the Bodhi Path Buddhist Meditation Center in Natural Bridge (with instruction by Lama Tsony); the Shantiniketan Hindu Temple in Roanoke; the Satchidananda Ashram, Yogaville, Va.; and/or the Blue Ridge Zen Group, Charlottesville. Some of these may take place on a Sunday.

Students also write a **paper** (roughly 4000–5000 words) on a topic chosen in consultation with the instructor during the first week. The purpose is to analyze a particular practice, text, or subtradition, drawing on relevant course readings and outside sources as necessary. The concentrated focus on the paper topic will help anchor each student's coursework to a point of depth that will help frame the range of topics covered in class. The paper counts for 2/3 of the final grade.

OBJECTIVES

- Factual knowledge of the range of meditative techniques in Hinduism and Buddhism, including their development and their differences
- Understanding of how meditation is incorporated into practices and cultures, and of its role as a practical adjunct of Asian schools of thought
- Familiarity with insider and outsider perspectives on meditation
- Awareness of different methods of scholarly engagement
- Personal experience of basic meditation techniques as one way of assessing their potential utility, whether in Asian religions or in general

ADVICE TO STUDENTS ON THE MEDITATION COMPONENT OF THE COURSE

The course will not assess your skill as a meditator, nor assume any commitment to or progress towards any religious or salvific goal; the instructor likewise is not an expert practitioner. Rather, the daily sitting is simply intended to provide a practical, experiential engagement with the ideas introduced in the readings and in seminar.

The practical component of this class will necessitate some adjustment to the rest of your life. For example, meditating in the morning and evening will require that you not wake up 10 minutes before class begins, and that you save ten minutes to sit before socializing in the evening. I will not seek documentation of your practice out of class, but you are on your honor to complete it. You are also asked to observe a simple dietary regimen: (1) no soda (whether artificially sweetened or not) for the entire four weeks; and (2) no meditation will under the influence of any intoxicant (apart from caffeine present in tea or coffee).

Some people notice a difference between meditating alone and with others, at one time of day versus another, or in other varying circumstances. As a class, we will practice in different settings. After each session, whether alone or in a group, you should take

careful stock of your feelings and perceptions afterward, and “translate” these into words as soon as possible. It can be frustrating that the raw experience eludes our speaking it, and the very memory of it shifts shape as we try to form a definite thought about it. That is why this mode of mind — at once clear and uncanny — lends itself to paradox and indirection, and as perfect stillness, it is said to be the opposite of thought.

READINGS

The Olivelle, Miller, and Shaw books are available for purchase in the bookstore.

* Sakai readings should be printed out and brought to class. No laptops can be used during the seminar meetings.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Week I An Ancient Science of the Self?

4/21 Early speculation on cognition and being in the *Upaniṣads*: “The contest of the ‘breaths’ or ‘vital powers’”; the “internal sacrifice”; sleep and dream; stages of consciousness (read and discuss in class); first sitting

4/22 Olivelle, *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*, ch. 1.2.1–7 and 1.4; chs. 2–4; ch. 6.1–3; *Taittirīya* 1.6 (pp. 181–182); *Kauṣītaki* 2.5 and 2.11–14 (pp. 212–215).

4/23 *Chāndogya*, chs. 5, 6, and 8; *Māṇḍūkya*, *Praśna*.

4/24 Meditation in Context I: Meditation in Hindu devotion
“Sri Aurobindo (Excerpts),” *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*, ed. S. Radhakrishnan and Ch. A. Moore (Princeton UP, 1957), pp. 575–609.
Three websites: <http://www.aurosociety.org> , <http://www.auroville.org> ,
<http://www.sriurobindoashram.org>

4/27 *Sunday Satsang at Shantiniketan Hindu Temple, Roanoke.*

Week II Radical Analysis: No Self!

4/28 *The Life of the Buddha**; Shaw, *Buddhist Meditation*, chs. 1–3.

4/29 Shaw, Chs. 4–5.

4/30 Shaw, Chs. 6–8.

5/1 Meditation in Context II: Buddhist Practitioners
George Bond, “The Insight Meditation (*Vipassanā Bhāvanā*) Movement” and “Individual Lay Meditators,” in *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka**
Visit to Bodhi Path Buddhist Meditation Center, Natural Bridge, with guided meditation led by Lama Tsony (tentative date)

ALL-DAY FIELD TRIP TO WASHINGTON, D.C.

- *Sackler Gallery exhibits related to meditation in South and East Asia*

- *Asian luncheon and visit to Asian market*

Week III Therapies of Desire / Technologies of Attainment

- 5/5 Miller, *Yoga Sūtra: Discipline of Freedom*, introduction and chapters 1–2.
- 5/6 *Yoga Sūtra*, chapters 3–4.
- 5/7 Kundalini Yoga and 3HO — *Guest : Mukanday Moore*.
James Mallinson, “Yoga and Religion” (2013).
J.S. Hawley, “Nanak,” in *Songs of the Saints of India* (Princeton, 1988), 63–88.
websites: <http://www.yogibhajan.com> , <http://www.3ho.org>
- 5/8 Meditation in Context III: The Hindu Ashram
James Mallinson, “Haṭha Yoga,” in *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Hinduism* (2011), 771–81.
Visit to Yogaville, with meditation at the Light of Truth Universal Shrine (LOTUS)

Week IV Emptiness and Original Nature: Meditating in the World

- 5/12 Dhyāna > Chan > Zen / walking meditation
Shaw, Chs. 9–10; Excerpts from “Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch,”
“Biography of Caoshan,” and “Blue Cliff Records”*
- 5/13 Meditation in Context IV: Zen
Shaw, Ch. 11; handout on the tea ceremony
Visit to the W&L Tea House.
- 5/14 Zen and Cognitive Science
Austin, *Zen-Brain Reflections*, 29–72*
John Dunne, “Reification and Mindfulness: Frontiers of Contemplative Science,”
Root Lecture, W&L, 8 March 2012 (Tegrity recording with Powerpoint slides).
Walking the meditation labyrinth at R.E. Lee Episcopal Church
- 5/15 Wrap-Up
Sharf, “Buddhist Meditation and the Rhetoric of Experience”*
- 5/16 **Final paper due at 6 pm**