A clever man guards his attention as his most precious possession.  
--The Dhammapada

Attention, taken to the highest degree, is the same thing as prayer.

--Simone Weil

A student said to Master Ichu, "Please write for me something of great wisdom." Master Ichu picked up his brush and wrote one word: "Attention." The student said, "Is that all?" The master wrote, "Attention. Attention." The student became irritable. "That doesn't seem profound or subtle to me." In response, Master Ichu wrote simply, "Attention. Attention. Attention." In frustration, the student demanded, "What does this word 'attention' mean?" Master Ichu replied, "Attention means attention."

--Dialogues of the Zen Masters

Course Objectives:
There is a significant body of cultural work that seeks to describe the experience or results of contemplation, offer instruction in its various methods, or to induce or encourage a contemplative state. In this course, we will examine works from a range of religious, philosophical, and aesthetic traditions which deal with some aspect of contemplative experience (including meditation, prayer, mysticism, and varieties of attention). In addition, the course will provide ample opportunity to practice elemental writerly and critical skills: writing in whole structures, writing prolifically, writing abstractly and concretely, rewriting, and distinguishing observation from inference. Our final essay will include some practice in research.

Course Requirements:
- **Attendance (worth two letter grades).** You’ll receive a separate grade for this: 0-1 unexcused absence=A; 2 absences=B; 3 absences=C; 4 absences=D; 5 or more absences=F.
- **Written observations (worth three letter grades).** About a page on assigned reading, due in hard copy every class meeting.
- **Three short essays (worth one letter grade each) and one longer essay (worth two letter grades).** To prepare for these essays, we'll do some first-person writing to explore a variety of literary shapes, shapes which we'll also encounter in our readings. You'll submit a first draft of each essay in hard copy in class on the due date; I'll provide written observations; you'll submit a final draft in hard copy on the due date for a grade. The grade will reflect not only the quality of the essay but your timely submission of all drafts and preparatory writing. Late essays will be progressively downgraded.

NYU Classes:
We have a NYU Classes site where you’ll find:
- **Announcements**, including the current reading and writing assignments. Always check the Announcements page well in advance of each class meeting to make sure you know what the
current assignment is. Announcements will also be sent to you NYU email address, so please be sure you have set your settings to receive emails.

- **Course Readings:** There is one book to purchase or borrow: Myla Goldberg, *Bee Season* (Anchor, 2001). Copies are available at Shakespeare and Company (716 Broadway, corner of Washington Place). All other reading assignments will be in the form of electronic documents (web links, pdf’s or Word documents) found in "Resources." It’s your job to print out the day’s reading assignment and bring a hard copy to class. Here’s how to get access to the readings that are in our course pack:

  - Go to the NYU Bookstore web site: [http://www.bookstores.nyu.edu](http://www.bookstores.nyu.edu)
  - Click on the "Search All Books" link under Textbook Inquiry & Ordering In the "Search by ISBN" option
  - Enter 978200007334B
  - Proceed to Checkout and complete your order.
  - After completing your order you will receive an email with your access code and instructions regarding accessing the Digital Course Pack.

**A Few More Things to Keep in Mind:**

- **In-class writing:** We’ll be doing a lot of it, and I’ll ask you to do this the old-fashioned way: with paper and pen. Why? Because attention is not only one of the key subject we’ll be reading about (as an essential element of contemplative practice); it’s also one of the key skills we’ll be practicing as readers and writers. I’ve observed that the presence of laptops, etc. tends to interfere with the practice of this skill. So please leave laptops, tablets, and cell phones in their cases during class meetings.
- **Saving copies of your work:** Please always keep a back-up copy of everything you write for the class.
- **E-mail:** Sometimes I’ll need to contact you by e-mail. If you tend to use an e-mail address other than your NYU address, please arrange to have any mail sent to your NYU e-mail address automatically forwarded to your non-NYU address.
- **Electronic noise:** Please check to be sure your cell phone and other electronic noisemakers are turned off before coming to class. If you forget, and your cell phone rings in class (it happens to the best of us), please do not answer the phone! Just turn it off as unobtrusively and quickly as you can. We’ll all do our best to act as if we never heard it ring.
- **Arriving:** We’ll start class right on time. If for some extraordinary reason you arrive late, please quietly look in at the door to check to see if a fellow student is reading something out loud. If she/he is reading out loud, please wait until she/he is finished, then come in quietly.

**Academic Integrity:** Here is the Gallatin School’s official statement on academic integrity:

"As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website [www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html](http://www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html) for a full description of the academic integrity policy."
Reading and Assignment Schedule
This may be subject to some change as we move through the semester, so please always check our NYU Classes Announcements page (or your NYU E-mail) for current assignments.

Part 1: Fables, Aphorisms, Parables
Wednesday, Sept. 4: Name game. Fable 1. Prolific writing. HW: Fable 2.


Wednesday, Sept. 11: Hear observations on Blake and Heraclitus. Rewrite a proverb. HW: Read selections from The Dhammapada, The Gateless Gate and The Blue Cliff Record, and Eihei Dogen, "Actualizing the Fundamental Point" (Genjo Koon), "Birth and Death" (Shoji). Choose one section from each for written observations.


Wednesday, Sept. 18: Hear observations on Tao te Ching. HW: Read selections from The Dhammapada, The Gateless Gate and The Blue Cliff Record, and Eihei Dogen, "Actualizing the Fundamental Point" (Genjo Koon), "Birth and Death" (Shoji). Choose one section from each for written observations.

Monday, Sept. 23: Hear observations on reading. HW: Read selections from Pelagius, Sayings of the Desert Fathers and Simone Weil, "Attention and Will."


Part 2: Two Ways: Cataphasis and Apophasis
Monday, Sept. 30: Hear "Once/Now" core-essays. Submit. HW: Write a second "Once/Now" core-essay, with a new first paragraph that expands the seed sentence into a defining idea.

Wednesday, Oct. 2: Hear a "Once/Now" core-essay + intro. Observe and write conclusions: "How does one thing look in different circumstances?" Submit. Write seed sentences for Essay 1, on any two texts we’ve read so far. HW: Write a first draft of Essay 1.


Monday, Oct. 14: COLUMBUS DAY, NO CLASS MEETING

Wednesday, Oct 16: Hear observations on Hopkins. HW: Read Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself”; choose any two sections for written observation.


Wednesday, Oct. 23: Hear observations on readings. HW: Read Meister Eckhart, Sermons 52 and 101; choose one passage from each sermon for written observations. Read and write observations on Heart Sutra, and selections from Nagarjuna, "Verses from the Center"

Monday, Oct. 28: Hear observations on readings. Seed Sentences for Essay 2. HW: First draft Essay 2 with introduction and conclusion

**Part 3: How to Get (T)here from Here: Instruction and Itinerary**


Monday, Nov. 4: Hear drafts of Foresight essay. Write conclusion for one: "What was the goal, and how was it achieved?" Submit. HW: Rewrite Essay 3 for a grade. Read and write observations on: Philokalia: "Discourse of Abba Philemon"; Letters of Spiritual Direction: "The Silent Outcry"; Abraham Abulafia selections. Write observations on each.

Wednesday, Nov. 6: Hear observations on readings. HW: Read Thomas Merton, "Learn to Be Alone," "Mental Prayer," "Distraction"; Rumi, "The Sunrise Ruby", "Today, like every other day"; Eihei Dogen, "Rules for Zazen." Choose one passage from Merton for written observations; write observations on each of the shorter texts.

**Part 4: Assessment, Argument, Research**

Monday, Nov. 11: Hear observation on readings. Write seed-sentences: "Two Voices.” HW: Two Voices core-essay+ new first paragraph.

Wednesday, Nov. 13: Two Voices Essay. Write conclusions: "To what extent is each way valid?" HW: Read Goldberg, Bee Season. Choose any two passages for written observation.


Monday, Nov. 25: Hear Hindsight essays. Write conclusions: "What was the source of the significant pattern?" HW: "Insight" core essay + introduction. Rewrite Essay 3 for a grade.
Wednesday, Nov. 27: Hear "Insight" essays. Write conclusion: "In this situation, what is the governing principle or policy?" HW: Choose one artist/author/work we've observed this semester. Reread what we've read and your own journal entries about the works we've observed. Write a list of at least ten questions you have about this author's or artist's work, life, historical context, contemplative methods, etc. Choose the most interesting question (or set of related questions). Write the answer to this question: what kind of sources might help me answer this question?

Monday, Dec. 2: Bobst Library orientation. HW: Find two sources related to your research questions. Read the sources and gather quotations that pertain to your research question. Write a short paragraph describing each source: what is it, and why is it useful for your essay?

Wednesday, Dec. 4: Hear research questions and information about source material in class. Citing sources in essays. Seed sentences for final essay, using one of the essay shapes we've practiced. HW: Write a draft of Essay 4, with introduction and conclusion, using source material to help support your own observations.


Wednesday, Dec. 11: Get back first drafts of Essay 4. Final drafts due via e-mail on date of scheduled final exam.