Religious practices of meditation and contemplation have recently emerged as “mindfulness based interventions” (MBI) in medicine, education, the arts, and popular culture. In most of these settings, the religious and historical affiliations of these practices are downplayed and their uses for developing spiritual, even mystical, states of consciousness are minimized. In this class, we go the other direction to explore the relationship between MBI and religious/spiritual practices.

We start with a close reading of key secular texts devoted to mindfulness and we compare and contrast these with a range of original texts from religious sources. Along the way, we use theoretical and philosophical work from cultural studies and religious studies to contextualize and politicize key terms and concepts. Authors and texts include Jon Kabat-Zinn, William James, Stuart Hall, Thich Nhat Hahn, Bhagavad Gita, Cloud of Unknowing, Plotinus, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Mary Oliver, Bill Viola, and Joanna Macy.
Books:

- Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living*
- Father Cyprian, *Prayer in the Cave of the Heart*
- Thich Nhat Hahn, *The Heart of Understanding: Commentaries on the Prajnaparamita Heart Sutra*

Suggested:

- Sharon Salzberg, *Room to Breath: At Home Medit.* ( audible.com )

Schedule:

1.) **Intro: Religious Studies, Cultural Studies, and the Circuits of Culture**

   **T 9/6:** Websites: NYU Mindfulness (Resources Intro video), NYC Mindfulness, NYU Relig Studies, NYU Soc and Cult Analysis Video: Hall: *Representation*

   **Th 9/8:** Hall: *Representation*

2.) **Mindfulness and the Circuits of Culture**

   **T 9/13:** Wilson: *Waking Up in Mindful America*  
   Wilson: *Medicalizing Mindfulness*

   Video: Mindfulness for Life: An Interview Kabat-Zinn on Kanopy—10/44 mins (4 days)

   **Th 9/15:** Kabat-Zinn

3.) **Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction**

   **T 9/20:** Kabat-Zinn

   **Th 9/22:** Kabat-Zinn  
   Ricard, Lutz, Davidson: *Mind of the Meditator*

4.) **Death of Ivan Illich and Mysticism**

   **T 9/27:** Tolstoy: *Death of Ivan Illich*

   Audio: Kabat-Zinn Guided Meditation (5 days)

   **Th 9/29:** James: *Mysticism from Varieties of Religious Experience*
Stace: Mysticism Phenomenology Chart
Hood: Mysticism Scale

5.) Mindfulness, Mysticism, and Narrative/Participatory Theory

T 10/4: Lewis: Mindfulness, Mysticism, and Narrative Medicine
*Lewis: Narrating Our Sadness: With a Little Help from Humanities
Ferrer: Spiritual Knowing as Participatory Enaction

Th 10/6: Griffiths: Psilocybin Can Occasion Mystical-Type Experiences
MacReady: Psychedelics and End of Life
Horwitz: A Guide to Writing Papers

Handout: Academic Paper Structure

Paper 1 Thesis: Kabot-Zinn’s phrase “mystical hocus pocus” obscures an opening in MBSR to mystical experience.

6.) Writing discussion week

T 10/11: Bring in paper Tuesday, workshop with classmates, rewrite.

Th 10/13: PAPER DUE

Video: Thich Nhat Hahn (3 days)

7.) Buddhism

T 10/18: Thich Nhat Hahn: Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing (9-29)
Thich Nhat Hahn: Heart Sutra (Forward-27)

Th 10/20: Thich Nhat Hahn: Heart Sutra (finish)

8.) Hinduism

T 10/25: Bhagavad Gita (Introduction and Ch 1-6)

Video: Baghavad Gita: World According to Benny and Learner (2 days)

Th 10/27: Bhagavad Gita (Ch 6-13)

9.) Christianity
**T 11/1:** Cyprian Consiglio: *Prayer... Cave of the Heart* (Pref, Ch 1, 4, 5)  
Pennington: *Centering Prayer* (Pref)  
Gregory of Nyssa (140-144)  
Cloud of Unknowing (333-337)  

Video: Bede Griffiths (Trailer) and Father Cyprian’s Music

**Th 11/3:** Cyprian Consiglio: *Prayer... Cave of the Heart* (Chapter 6)  
Coe: Musings on Dark Night of Soul  
John of the Cross (excerpts)

Paper 2: Thesis—From the perspective of participatory spirituality, mystical writings from Buddhist, Hindu, and Christian traditions may be used to enhance MBSR.

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**10.) Writing Discussion and Romanticism**

**T 11/8:** Bring in paper Tuesday, workshop with classmates, rewrite.

**Th 11/10: PAPER DUE**

Video: Romantics Eternity: Wordsworth Section  
In Class: Wordsworth: Crossing Mount Snowden, Mary Oliver: Summer Day and Mindful

**11.) Philosophy: Ancient and Transcendental**

**T 11/15:** Hadot: *What is Ancient Philosophy*: Intro, Socrates, Plotinus  
Plotinus: from *Varieties of Mystic Experience*

**Th 11/17:** Ralph Waldo Emerson: Intro and “The Transcendentalist”  
Margaret Fuller: Recollection of a Mystical Experience  

Video: Thoreau (World According to Benny)

**12.) Creative Arts**

**T 11/22:** Robertson and McDaniel: *Themes of Cont. Art*, Spirituality  
Alan de Botton: *Art as Therapy*, The Sublime

Video: Bill Viola

**THANKSGIVING BREAK**

**T 11/29:** Nathanial Dorsky: Devotional Cinema article  
Cristophe Andre: Mindfulness Through art
Video: Opening of Tokyo Story
Tree of Life

13.) Politics

Th 12/1: Marx and Freud (quotes)
Carrette and King: Selling Spirituality selections
Wilson: Moralizing Mindfulness

T 12/6: Ghandi: The Message of the Gita (Appendix to Bhagavad-Gita)
Rothenberg: Awakening for all Beings
Macy: Taking Heart: Spiritual Practices for Activists

Paper 3: Thesis: Mystical experience goes beyond (should not be equated with) religious experience—it is also important in philosophy, politics, and the arts.

14.) Writing Discussion

Th 12/8: Bring in paper Tuesday, workshop with classmates, rewrite.

Th 12/15: PAPER DUE

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Grades are based on three parts: attendance/participation (1/4) and 3 papers (3/4 each). The attendance/participation grade is composed of weekly class readings, participation, and attendance. There can be one excused absence for each half of the class. After that, I drop a letter grade for each missed class.

Class will generally begin with a short presentation on the material for that week. Class discussion will be initiated by your selections from the material. To prepare for class discussion, please type or mark a quote for each week’s reading (include author and page numbers so we can find your quotes). The quote should be something that you want to discuss. We will ask for the quotes selected during class discussion.

Papers are 5 pages type written, double spaced. Please use the material from the class to develop the topic question I hand out. Back up your thesis with arguments and examples from the class readings. Please include internal citations with page numbers and a reference list at the end. A good paper demonstrates that you have integrated the material from the class discussions and readings and can use it to analyze your topics. Use the bulk of your energy reading closely and thinking seriously about the materials you have (rather than doing outside research). Also, be sure and give your paper a title.

The grading scale for the class will be as follows: A+ (98), A (95), A- (91), B+ (89), B (85), B- (81), C+ (79), C (75), C- (71), D (65), and F (number below 65).

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

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Gallatin Policy: “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.” For more information, please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website (http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/integrity.html)

Vincent van Gogh (1889) The Starry Night