**Carleton University 2023–2024**

**The College of the Humanities**

**Religion Program: RELI 2713A Winter Term**

**Mystical and Contemplative Traditions**

**Instructor**: Professor Mohammed Rustom

**Office hours**: By appointment

**Meetings**: Mon. 2:35 pm-5:25 pm

*Note: Please send course-related emails to* [mohammed.rustom@carleton.ca](mailto:mohammed.rustom@carleton.ca)*. I will endeavour to reply to inquiries within twenty-four hours of receipt. Emails should be professional and free of solecisms.*

**Course Description**

This course offers an in-depth investigation into mystical, philosophical, and contemplative traditions. We shall explore such key topics as the nature of being and consciousness, the role of meditation and the cultivation of virtue in the quest for wisdom and understanding, the debate surrounding PCEs or “Pure Consciousness Events,” and the relationship between empiricism and ineffability.

**Learning Outcomes**

*By the completion of this course, students will be able to*:

* Engage with primary texts and analyze secondary texts
* Understand the main contours of the academic study of what is commonly referred to as “religious experience” in general, and “mysticism” in particular
* Distinguish descriptive, explanatory, and prescriptive modes of discourse

**Required Texts**

Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (bookstore)

Perry (ed.), *The Spiritual Ascent* (course site)

**Requirements**

/25 Assignment 1

/35 Assignment 2

/40 Assignment 3

**Schedule of Lectures and Readings**

**Jan. 8 The Subject Matter of Mysticism**

Readings

Perry, “Separation—Sin” (pp. 53ff.) and “Faith” (pp. 499ff.)

**Jan. 15 Mysticism and Modes of Thought**

Readings

Perry, “Renunciation—Detachment” (pp. 135ff.)

**Jan. 22 Illusion vs. Reality**

Readings

Perry, “Illusion” (pp. 83ff.) and “Reality” (pp. 771ff.)

**Jan. 29 Knowledge and the Sacred**

Listen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPV0RC9CDis>

**Feb. 5 The Problem of Mystical Experience**

Readings

Perry, “Charity” (pp. 595ff.) and “Ecstasy” (pp. 634ff.)

**Feb. 12 Mysticism and Modern Epistemology**

Readings

Perry, “Love” (pp. 612ff.) and “Knowledge” (pp. 731ff.)

**Feb. 19 Reading week; no class**

**Feb. 26 Pure Consciousness Events (PCEs)**

Readings

Perry, “Metanoia” (pp. 479ff.)

**Mar. 4**  **The Critique of Reductionism**

Readings

Perry, “Grace” (pp. 550ff.) and “Realization and Identity” (pp. 855ff.)

**Mar. 11 *Inception***

Watch

<https://84.46.254.230/inception-2010/#download>

**Mar. 18 Apophasis and the Limits of Language**

Readings

Perry, “Mysterium Magnum” (pp. 971ff.)

**Mar. 25 Contemplative Practices**

Readings

Perry, “Prayer—Meditation—Contemplation” (pp. 520ff.)

**Apr. 1 Final Paper Workshop**

**Apr. 8 Course wrap-up**

**Assignment 1**

**Instructions**

Carefully read Seyyed Hossein Nasr’s book, *Knowledge and the Sacred*. The first part of the paper must thoroughly summarize the book’s content (but not chapter-by-chapter). The second part must offer an analysis of the author’s underlying argument.

**Value**

The paper is out of 25 and is worth 25% of the total course mark.

**Due Date**

Papers are due via email on **February 5th**.

**Late Assignments**

Papers submitted late due to medical or other compassionate reasons must be accompanied by relevant documentation.

**Form**

1. Your paper should be **six** full pages in length, double spaced, and written in Times New Roman font (size 12).
2. Diction is to be formal, and each piece is to be written in Canadian English. Grammar, syntax, spelling, and style must be impeccable. You may write in the first person.
3. At the top right of the first page of your paper, include the course code, your full name, and the assignment’s due date. This should be in Times New Roman font (size 12).
4. When citing materials, please follow the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

**Assignment 2**

**Instructions**

Address **one** of the following topics/questions (see course website for the mandatory text relevant to your selection):

1. Why is the love of God so central to Sufism?

2. Explain the notion of non-duality in Advaita Vedanta.

3. How does the Jesus Prayer function in Eastern Orthodox Christianity?

**Value**

The paper is out of 35 and is worth 35% of the total course mark.

**Due Date**

Papers are due via email submission on **March 11th**.

**Late Assignments**

Papers submitted late due to medical or other compassionate reasons must be accompanied by relevant documentation.

**Form**

1. Your paper should be **eight** full pages in length, double spaced, and written in Times New Roman font (size 12).
2. Diction is to be formal, and each piece is to be written in Canadian English. Grammar, syntax, spelling, and style must be impeccable. You may write in the first person.
3. At the top right of the first page of your paper, include the course code, your full name, and the assignment’s due date. This should be in Times New Roman font (size 12).
4. When citing materials, please follow the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

**Assignment 3**

**Instructions**

Drawing on the class lectures and the texts in *The Spiritual Ascent*, address **both** of the following topics. Use appropriate examples to illustrate your points.

1. Explain the mystical doctrine of the Absolute and the relative (i.e., the Principle and Its manifestation).

2. Describe the manner in which mystics envision the true nature and fallen state of the “self.” Then, explain the relationship between doctrine and method as the self treads the spiritual path in an attempt to recover its primordial state.

**Value**

Each question is out of 20 and is worth 20% of the total course mark. Thus, your entire paper is out of 40 and is worth 40% of the total course mark.

**Due Date**

Papers will be due via email submission on **April 8th**.

**Late Assignments**

Papers submitted late due to medical or other compassionate reasons must be accompanied by relevant documentation.

**Form**

1. **Each** of your answers should be **four** full pages in length, double spaced, and written in Times New Roman font (size 12). So the total number of pages for this assignment is **eight** pages.
2. Diction is to be formal, and each piece is to be written in Canadian English. Grammar, syntax, spelling, and style must be impeccable. You may write in the first person.
3. At the top right of the first page of your paper, include the course code, your full name, and the assignment’s due date. This should be in Times New Roman font (size 12).
4. When citing materials, please follow the *Chicago Manual of Style*.