

**The College of the Humanities  
Religion Program: RELI 2713B Winter Term  
Mystical and Contemplative Traditions**

**Instructor:** Professor Mohammed Rustom

**Meetings:** Tues. 8:35 pm-11:25

**Office hours:** By appointment am

**Lectures:** Synchronous (via Zoom)

*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 Objectives**

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

- ❖ Engage with primary texts and analyze secondary texts
- ❖ Properly cite references in a paper
- ❖ Understand the main contours of the academic study of what is commonly referred to as “religious experience” in general, and “mysticism” in particular
- ❖ Critically analyze a wide range of materials from different traditions

**Required Texts**

*Readings in Mysticism* = RM (course site)

Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (bookstore)

Perry (ed.), *The Spiritual Ascent* (bookstore)

**Requirements**

- /20 Book Report
- /40 Research Paper
- /40 Take-Home Exam

**Schedule of Lectures and Readings**

**Jan. 11**      **The Subject Matter of Mysticism**  
Readings

Perry, "Separation—Sin" (pp. 53ff.) and "Faith" (pp. 499ff.)  
James, "Mysticism" in *RM*

**Jan. 18      Mysticism and Modes of Thought**

Readings

Perry, "Renunciation—Detachment" (pp. 135ff.)  
Russel, "Mysticism and Logic" in *RM*

**Jan. 25      Illusion vs. Reality**

Readings

Perry, "Illusion" (pp. 83ff.) and "Reality" (pp. 771ff.)  
Price, "The Objectivity of Mystical Truth Claims" in *RM*

**Feb. 1      Knowledge and the Sacred**

Listen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPV0RC9CDIs>

**Feb. 8      The Problem of Mystical Experience**

Readings

Perry, "Charity" (pp. 595ff.) and "Ecstasy" (pp. 634ff.)  
Prigge/Kessler, "Is Mystical Experience Everywhere the Same?" in *RM*

**Feb. 15      Mysticism and Modern Epistemology**

Readings

Perry, "Knowledge" (pp. 731ff.)

**Feb. 22      Reading week; no class**

**Mar. 1      Interpreting the Data of Mysticism**

Readings

Perry, "Metanoia" (pp. 479ff.) "Love" (pp. 612ff.)  
Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism" in *RM*

**Mar. 8      Pure Consciousness Events (PCEs)**

Readings

Forman, "Mysticism, Constructivism, and Forgetting" in *RM*  
Ogunnaike, "An Akbari Approach to the Problem of Pure Consciousness"

**Mar. 15      The Critique of Reductionism**

Readings

Perry, "Grace" (pp. 550ff.) and "Realization and Identity" (pp. 855ff.)  
Shah-Kazemi, "Against the Reduction of the Transcendent" in *RM*

**Mar. 22      Apophysis and the Limits of Language**

Readings

Perry, "Mysterium Magnum" (pp. 971ff.)  
Sells, "Unsayings" in *RM*

- Mar. 29**      **Contemplative Practices I**  
                 Readings  
                 Perry, "Prayer—Meditation—Contemplation" (pp. 520ff.)
- Apr. 5**        **Contemplative Practices II**  
                 Readings  
                 Perry, "Prayer—Meditation—Contemplation" (pp. 520ff.)
- Apr. 12<sup>th</sup>**    **Take-Home Exam Workshop**

## **Book Report Guidelines**

### **Instructions**

Carefully read Seyyed Hossein Nasr's book, *Knowledge and the Sacred*. The first part of the report 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. This assignment is designed to provide you with an opportunity to think critically about this important book. It will also help you hone your academic writings skills. Moreover, close study of this text will prove to be very beneficial in preparing for the research paper and the take-home exam.

### **Method of Evaluation**

The report is out of 20, and is worth 20% of the total course mark. For a "good" mark, you have to (1) follow the format guidelines to a tee; (2) offer an effective summary of the text; (3) demonstrate to me, through your analysis of the work in question, that you have given considerable thought to the material.

### **Due Date**

Papers are due via email submission at **8 am on February 8<sup>th</sup>**.

## **Penalties**

Reports not handed in on the due date will receive a mark of zero. Absolutely no exceptions will be made to this rule. In cases of illness, students must submit their self-declaration within twenty-four hours of the termination of their illness, along with the missed assignment. Plagiarized papers will be handled by the Dean's office.

## **Format**

1. Your report should be **six** full pages in length, double spaced, and written in Times New Roman font (size 12). It must use the normal page layout which comes standard on all Word programs, and page numbers must be on the bottom right corner of the page.
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 report, include the course code, your full name, and the assignment's due date. This should be in Times New Roman font (size 12).
4. All paragraphs—except the first paragraph of your piece—must be indented. Every paragraph of the paper—including isolated quotations—must be justified. This can easily be done by using the “paragraph” function on your Word program.
5. There are to be no title pages, footnotes, endnotes, or bibliographies. If you want to directly cite the book or article in your report, provide the passages in quotation marks, and then, in brackets directly following the quoted passage, include the page number, preceded by a “p.” For example, (p. 29).
6. If you cite from the book or article, do not put your quotations in italics, bold, or a combination of the two. Sentences which are more than 3 lines long are to be isolated, single spaced, and reduced to font size 11 with their margins indented to 1 inch on both the right and the left. This can easily be done by using the “paragraph” function on your Word program.

## **Research Paper Guidelines**

### **Instructions**

Address one of the following topics/questions:

1. Critically assess the worldview of one particular mystical figure. By drawing extensively from his/her works, provide a careful, textually-grounded presentation and analysis of his/her major teachings. Be sure to consult with me once you have selected a figure, and I will point you to some essential resources.
2. Why is the love of God so central to Sufism? If you choose to work on this topic, see course site for the main text.
3. Explain the notion of non-duality in Advaita Vedanta. If you choose to work on this topic, see course site for the main text.
4. How does the Jesus Prayer function in Eastern Orthodox Christianity? If you choose to work on this topic, see course site for the main text.
5. A topic of your choice in consultation with the Professor.

### **Evaluation**

Essays are graded out of 40, and are worth 40% of the total course mark. Each essay will be evaluated in terms of (1) the quality of its language, including grammar, spelling, and style; (2) the clarity of its thesis, (3) the coherence of its argument(s), (4) evidence of original research and its careful integration into the fabric of the essay; and (5) faithful adherence to the content and formatting guidelines mentioned below.

### **Content**

The paper must have a clear thesis which is defended consistently throughout. An essay without a thesis cannot receive more than a C+. A thesis essentially summarizes, in one or several sentences, the entire point of your essay. It is simply not enough to say "This essay is going to talk about x, y, and z"; you must be more specific than that. A good thesis should be concise and straightforward, and must endeavour to prove a point: "In

this essay, it shall be demonstrated that, because of x, y and z obtain.” You may not use the wording of this example in your essay.

### **Due Date**

Papers are due via email submission at **8 am on March 29<sup>th</sup>**.

### **Penalties**

Reports not handed in on the due date will receive a mark of zero. Absolutely no exceptions will be made to this rule. In cases of illness, students must submit their self-declaration within twenty-four hours of the termination of their illness, along with the missed assignment. Plagiarized papers will be handled by the Dean’s office.

### **Form**

1. Essays are to be **ten** full pages in length (excluding the title page and bibliography), double spaced, and written in Times New Roman font (size twelve).
2. Diction is to be formal, and the essay is to be written in Canadian English. Grammar, syntax, spelling, and style must be impeccable.
3. All paragraphs—except the first paragraph of your essay—must be indented. Every paragraph in your essay—including isolated quotations and footnotes—must be justified.
4. Use footnotes as opposed to endnotes and/or internal citations. Footnotes are to be single spaced and written in Times New Roman font (size ten). A bibliography must be appended to the essay. Your method of citation must follow the rules laid out in the *Chicago Manual of Style*.
6. Do not put your quotations in italics, bold, or a combination of the two. Sentences which are more than three lines long are to be isolated, single spaced, and reduced to font size eleven with their margins indented to one inch on both the right and the left.
7. Your essay must have a title page. All pages—excluding the title page and bibliography—are to be numbered at the bottom right corner of the page.

## **Take-Home Exam Guidelines**

### **Content**

The take-home exam will cover all of the course's lectures and assigned readings, from the first lecture to the last.

### **Dates**

The exam questions will be made available on the course website on **April 5<sup>th</sup>**. The completed exam will be due via email submission at **8 am on April 28<sup>th</sup>**.

### **Structure**

The exam is divided into two parts. The entire exam is out of 40, and is worth 40% of the total course mark.

Part I will consist of one question which must be answered and Part II consists of two questions, one of which must be answered. Each section is out of 20, and is worth 20% of the total course mark. The answers in both parts are response-type questions.

This means that responses do not have to be in essay format. They simply have to address the questions asked in as thorough and thoughtful a manner as possible. Answers must be both descriptive and analytical.