Religious Studies 335: Comparative Mysticism

This course aims to explore the meanings and manifestations of mysticism in the world's major religious traditions. First, we will examine a number of general concepts and themes, and then survey these traditions' mystical developments. In the third part of the course, we will reflect on contemporary debates with regard to language, Modernity, and the arts. Being interdisciplinary by nature, the course combines several approaches, including literary, historical, political, anthropological, sociological, psychological, philosophical, and aesthetic ones.

OBJECTIVES:
1) to gain a better understanding of the meanings and manifestations of spirituality and mysticism;
2) be able to identify the major concepts and features of mysticism in the main religious traditions;
3) interpret mystical texts, symbols, images, and other representations spiritually and mystically;
4) become aware of mystical accounts of prominent mystics and articulate their commonalities;
5) develop a better understanding of mystical narratives and their relevance to the humanities and sciences in today's world.

READINGS:
Karen Armstrong, Visions of God: Four Medieval Mystics and Their Writings;
Anamvile Schimmel, I Am the Wind, You Are Fire: The Life and Work of Rumi;
Gershom Scholem, Zochar, The Book of Splendor: Basic Readings from the Kabbalah;
Wayne Teasdale, The Mystic Heart: Discovering a Universal Spirituality in the World's Religions;
Several articles and book chapters (cited in the schedule below) that will be available on Blackboard.

REQUIREMENTS:
Two exams (20%+25%=45%)
Reaction paper/report (3 pages, 35%);
Individual/group project/presentation (20%).

POLICIES:
The Blackboard System (www.blackboard.sdsu.edu)
The use of Blackboard is MANDATORY and you will be unable to get credit for the class without it. The lecture outlines, assignments, and other forums are regularly posted on Blackboard. In addition, all communications are transmitted through Blackboard. You are also encouraged to communicate with classmates on the DISCUSSION BOARD especially if you are participating in a group project or any other in-class activity. Make sure that your computer and software programs are compatible with Blackboard at all times.

Attendance:
You are expected to attend lectures regularly; this is not negotiable. Recurrent absences will result in an early withdrawal from the course or a final “F” for the class. In case of absence, please obtain lecture notes from another student in the class, but it is crucial to remember that the notes of someone else may not guarantee your understanding of missed lectures. Missing lectures will certainly jeopardize your chances to answer exam questions, participate in the in-class projects and/or group oral exams, and, subsequently, obtain credit for the course.

Lecture Notes and Outlines:
Lecture notes cannot and will NOT be posted on Blackboard. This is not an on-line course. Lecture outlines, on the other hand, will be available on Blackboard the night before the lecture; remember that they are NOT sufficient for understanding the content of lectures, let alone the spontaneous discussions and other in-class activities; all three exams will include some questions derived from such discussions and activities.

Office:
I am available ONLY during office hours and look forward to discussing with you class requirements, topics covered, or any other concerns you may have about the class. If office hours are inconvenient, please talk to me before/after class to make an appointment.
Please DO NOT leave notes/messages out under my office door. Remember also that there will be NO office hours during final exams week.

Phone:
You are welcome to call my office phone number if necessary, but ONLY during office hours.
Please DO NOT leave voice mail or messages with colleagues and department personnel.

E-mail:
E-mails are answered in the order received and, therefore, if your e-mail necessitates a response, be patient and wait for a couple of days before you assume it went unnoticed; thus, re-send it only after two days. More importantly, in an age of spam e-mails, unidentifiable e-mails will be unopened and deleted instantly; “unidentifiable e-mails” means e-mails without full name & class number in the SENDER and/or SUBJECT space. Thus, if you do not receive a response, check to see if your e-mail had a full name & class number in the SENDER and/or SUBJECT space.

Laptops, cell phones, and other Electronics:
NOT ALLOWED during lectures, NO EXCEPTIONS.
LECTURE AND READING SCHEDULE:
Note that the reading assignments are roughly distributed between the weeks and may not be directly related to the discussion topic of that week.

PART ONE: PRELIMINARY DISCOURSES

W-1  Religionism, Spirituality and Mysticism; Hermeneutics
     8/30  Teasdale, "Forward," by the Dalai Lama, xiii-xix;
     Teasdale, "Preface," by Beatrice Bruceatia, xvii-xix;

W-2  From Spirituality to Mysticism and Back; Mystical Spirituality
     9/6   Teasdale, "The Mystic Heart: Our Common Heritage," 3-14;
     Teasdale, "A Bridge Across the Religions and Beyond," 15-25.

W-3  The Mystical Path: Journey, States, and Stations; Interspirituality
     Teasdale, "Crossing Over: Pioneers of Interspiritual Wisdom," 31-49;

W-4  The Self, the Soul, and the Divine; Consciousness
     9/20  Teasdale, "The Mirror of the Heart: Consciousness as the Root of Identity," 51-77;
     Teasdale, "The Paths Are Many But The Goal Is the Same: Discovering the Way," 79-102;

W-5  The Self, the Community, and the Other; Intermerging
     9/27  Teasdale, "The Mystic Character," 105-124;
     Teasdale, "Spiritual Practice: The Crux of Inner Change," 125-46;

PART TWO: MYSTICISM IN THE MAJOR TRADITIONS

W-6  Primal Traditions
     10/4  Teasdale, "Natural Mysticism: Reading the Book of Creation," 173-208;
     EXAM I (20%, w1-w5)

W-7  South Asian Traditions
     10/11  *Yogananda, Paramahansa, Jesus the Christ: Avatara and Yogi* in his The Yoga of Jesus, 3-40;

W-8  East Asian Traditions
     10/18  *Nhat, Hanh, Thich, Jesus and Buddha as Brothers," in his Going Home, 171-202;

W-9  Jewish Traditions
     10/25  Scholen, Introduction: Historical Background of the Zohar," vii-xxiii;
     Scholen, "The Beginning," to "Hidden Meanings of the Torah," 1-96;

W-10 Christian Traditions
     11/1  Armstrong, "Walter Hilton: The Ladder of Perfection," 107-70;
     *Excerpts from Teresa of Avila, The Interior Castle; and John of the Cross, The Dark Night of the Soul.

W-11 Islamic Traditions

PART THREE: SELECTED THEMES

W-12  Mysticism and Language; mystic speech
     *Cupid, Don, "Mysticism is a Kind of Writing," in his Mysticism after Modernity, 57-79;
     *Krae, Steven, "Mystical Speech and Mystical Meaning," in his Mysticism and Language, 3-41.
     EXAM II (20%, w6-w11)

W-13  11/22  Thanksgiving

W-14  Mysticism and (Post)Modernity; "mystic heart"
     Teasdale, "Opening the Heart of the World: Toward a Universal Mysticism," 235-50;

W-15  Mysticism and The Arts; "mystic love"
     12/6  Schimmel, "The Manifestation of Love," and "They Enter All the Dance, the Dance...", 173-204;
     *Rumi, "Love" tr. by Chittick from his The Sufi Path of Love, 194-231.

Reaction Paper is due (make sure you follow the instructions available on Blackboard, 35%)