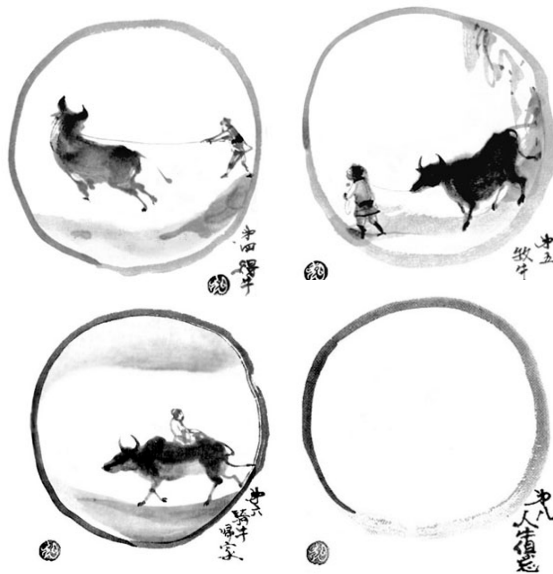


# Stages of the Contemplative Path

UNIV 0456



**Class:** T/Th 9:00-10:20am

Wilson Hall 309

**Lab:** M 4:00-5:00pm

Hillel Winnick Chapel

**Professor:** Jared R. Lindahl, Ph.D.

**email:** jared\_lindahl@brown.edu

**Office:** Religious Studies 300

**Office hours:** Tue 10:30-12 & by appointment

## *Course Description*

One of the fundamental metaphors for human life and self-transformation is the journey or the path. It should not be surprising that contemplative traditions across times and cultures also employ this literary metaphor to describe the stages, states, and traits of contemplative development. Imbued with imagery of daring ascents, fiery obstacles, and the taming of the various dimensions of the uncultivated self, this genre of literature offers both concise and expansive introductions to the theory, practice, and anticipated end goals of the contemplative life. Furthermore, the study of path structures allow us to carefully compare the relationship between specific cognitive, affective, and somatic practices, their resultant states and traits of human experience, and the meaning and value ascribed to them.

This course begins with a theoretical overview to the study of “paths” from humanistic and psychological perspectives. We will introduce one of the key debates that will guide our examination of specific paths, as well as our comparisons of various paths across traditions: Do contemplative paths reflect universal structures of human experience that are discovered through practice? Or, do contemplative paths shape culturally-specific dimensions of human experience that are constructed through practice? This debate is as old as some of the earliest contemplative traditions, and continues to raise critical issues for the humanistic, psychological, and scientific study of contemplative practices. Along the way, we will also investigate select dimensions of the contemplative path in the laboratory of our own experience.

## Course Objectives

- to adopt a multi-disciplinary and multi-perspectival approach to the study of stages of the path literature
- to discern the relationship between motivations, world-views, practices, experiences, character traits, behaviors, and goals within a given contemplative system
- to compare these dimensions of the contemplative path across traditions in order to illuminate each tradition as well as key debates in the study of contemplative traditions
- to apply these skills in an original research project investigating one or more contemplative paths from historical, comparative, or psychological perspectives
- to develop a personal philosophy for living and a toolkit of contemplative practices based upon the issues raised in and strategies provided by contemplative traditions past and present

## Assessment

- participation in class discussions, activities, & labs (15%)
- take-home reading guides and in-class quizzes (15%)
- critical first-person reflection journal (5 entries) (10%) **[due: 9/18, 10/9, 10/30; 11/18; 12/11]**
- three short essays (2-3 pages) (30%) **[due 10/16, 11/4, 11/20]**
- research paper (10-12 pages) (30%)
  - abstract & annotated bibliography (5%) **[due 11/24]**
  - research presentation (10%) **[week 14 or 15]**
  - final paper (15%) **[due 12/19]**

## Required Texts

- Shechen Rabjam, *The Great Medicine that Conquers Clinging to the Notion of Reality: Steps in Meditation on the Enlightened Mind* (Shambhala, 2007)
- readings on electronic reserve and the course canvas site

## Suggested Texts

- Bhikkhu Bodhi, *In the Buddha's Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pali Canon* (Wisdom, 2005)
- Matthew Flickstein, *The Meditator's Atlas: A Roadmap of the Inner World* (Wisdom, 2007)
- Martin Laird, *Into the Silent Land: A Guide to the Christian Practice of Contemplation* (Oxford, 2006)
- Gavin Flood, *The Truth Within: A History of Inwardness in Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism* (Oxford, 2013)

## *Schedule of Classes and Assigned Readings*

### §I. Preparing for the Path: Theories, Methods, and Debates

#### Week 1: Introduction

H 9/10: Introduction to the Course, to Contemplation, and to Paths

#### Week 2: “Path” as a Conceptual Metaphor and Literary Trope

M 9/14: **LAB:** Expectations, Goals, and Conceptions of Progress

T 9/15: Orientation through Body and Place

**read:** Lakoff and Johnson, selections from *Metaphors We Live By*; Tuan, *Topophilia*, Ch. 3: “Common Psychological Structures and Responses” **[25 pages]**

H 9/17: “Path” and “Way” in the Contemplative Psychology of Hans de Wit

**read:** de Wit, *Contemplative Psychology*, Ch. 2: “The Concept of ‘Way’ in Contemplative Psychology” **[46 pages]**

#### Week 3: Psychological Approaches to the Study of Contemplative Path Schemas

M 9/21: **LAB:** *Ānāpānasati*: Keeping the Breath in Mind

**read:** Ajahn Chan, *On Meditation*, pp. 11-16 **[5 pages]**

T 9/22: Attributional Approaches to the Study of Path Schemas

**read:** Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered*, pp.16-20, 26-29, 35-42, 46-55 **[33 pages]**

H 9/24: Debates Concerning Experience

**read:** Katz, selections from “Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism”; Forman, selections from “Mysticism, Constructivism, and Forgetting” **[35 pages]**

### §II. Comparisons Within Traditions: Buddhist Stages of the Path Literature

#### Week 4: Fundamentals of Buddhism: Theory and Practice

M 9/28: **LAB:** *Satipatthāna*: The Establishment of Mindfulness

**read:** Bodhi, *In the Buddha’s Words*, pp. 281-290 **[9 pages]**

T 9/29: The Life and Teachings of the Buddha

**read:** Bodhi, *In the Buddha’s Words*, pp. 54-67; 239-250 **[24 pages]**

H 10/1: Paths and Fruitions according to the Pāli Nikayas

**read:** Bodhi, *In the Buddha’s Words*, pp. 281-295; 373-381; 392-406 **[28 pages]**

F 10/2: Pir Zia Inayat-Khan lecture: Sufi Chivalry (optional, see Canvas)

S 10/3: Pir Zia Inayat-Khan workshop: Sufi Meditation (optional, see Canvas)

## Week 5: Stages of Concentration and Insight

M 10/5: **LAB:** Noting and Labeling

**read:** Mahasi Sayadaw, *Practical Insight Meditation*, Part 1: Basic Practice [15 pages]

T 10/6: Relationships between Concentration and Insight in Early Buddhism

**read:** Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, Ch. 7: “The Way of Calm and Insight” [39 pages]

H 10/8: The Stages of Insight according to *The Path of Purification* and its Commentaries

**read:** Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification*, vii-xv (Table of Contents); Nanarāma, *The Seven Stages of Purification and the Insight Knowledges*, Chs. 5-7 [30 pages]

## Week 6: Stages, Paths, Grounds, and Fruitions in Theravada and Mahāyāna Buddhisms

M 10/12: Fall Weekend Holiday NO LAB

T 10/13: The Insight Knowledges, Paths, and Fruitions

**read:** M. Sayadaw, *Practical Insight Meditation*, Part 2: Progressive Practice [31 pages]

H 10/15: The Perfections, Paths, and Grounds of the Bodhisattva

**read:** Wangchen, *Awakening the Mind of Enlightenment*, Chs. 1-4; Dhargyey, *The Tibetan Tradition of Mental Development*, Chs. 15, 16, 18 [43 pages]

## Week 7: The Stages of the Path (*Lam Rim*) Genre of Tibetan Literature

M 10/19: **LAB:** *Shamatha* from Tibetan Perspectives

**read:** Rabten, “The Perfection of Concentration”; annotations of the 33 stages; Lamrimpa, *How to Practice Shamatha Meditation*, selections [10 pages]

T 10/20: Tsongkhapa’s Stages of the Mahāyāna Path

**read:** Tsongkhapa, *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*, detailed ToC and Chs. 1:16, 1:22, 2:1 [46 pages]

H 10/22: Training in Compassion and Altruism

**read:** Rabjam, *The Great Medicine*, Chs. 1-5 [45 pages]

## Week 8: The Stages of the Path (*Lam Rim*) Genre of Tibetan Literature

M 10/26: **LAB:** *Tonglen*: Giving and Taking

**read:** Rabjam, *The Great Medicine*, Ch. 6 [9 pages]

T 10/27: Training in the Nyingma View

**read:** Rabjam, *The Great Medicine*, Ch. 7-12 [46 pages]

H 10/29: Conceptions of Path & Goal: The Sudden vs. Gradual Debate  
**read:** Klein, "Mental Concentration and the Unconditioned: A Buddhist Case for Unmediated Experience"; Rog Bande Sherab, "A Defense of the Great Perfection" pp. 243-246 **[32 pages]**

#### Week 9: Theoretical Issues in Paths and Results

M 11/2: **LAB:** *Dzogchen: The Great Perfection*  
**read:** Khenchen Palden Sherap, *Pointing out the Nature of Mind*, Chs. 5, 14-16 **[13 pages]**

T 11/3: Discussion: Development or Discovery?  
**read:** Sharf, "The Rhetoric of Meditative Experience and the Study of Religion" **[10 pages]**

H 11/5: Transition: A Comparative Theory of Interiority  
**read:** Flood, *The Truth Within*, "The Phenomenology of Inwardness" **[20 pages]**

### §III. Comparisons Across Traditions: Path Structures in Abrahamic Traditions

#### Week 10: The Inner Landscape: Environmental Imagery in Orthodox and Catholic Christianities

M 11/9: **LAB:** The Three Doorways of the Present Moment  
**read:** Laird, *Into the Silent Land*, pp. 52-69 **[17 pages]**

T 11/10: Mountain and Desert as Metaphors for the Contemplative Path  
**read:** Lane, *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes*, Ch. 3; Burton-Christie, "The Place of the Heart: Geography and Spirituality in the *Life of Antony*" **[37 pages]**

H 11/12: Darkness and Light on the Way up the Mountain  
**read:** Louth, *The Wilderness of God*, Ch. 5: "Mount Carmel and St. John of the Cross"; Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey into God*, pp. 58-78; 94-95; 110-116 **[36 pages]**

#### Week 11: Models of Contemplative Ascent in Christianity and Sufism

M 11/16: **LAB:** Silence, Watchfulness, Recitation, and Stillness  
**read:** Laird, *Into the Silent Land*, pp. 36-42 **[6 pages]**

T 11/17: Climbing Ladders  
**read:** Ware, "Introduction to *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*," pp. 1-16, 43-58; Hilton, *The Ladder of Perfection*, vii-xv (ToC) **[40 pages]**

H 11/19: Inner Silence and Inner Images as Signs of Progress in Sufism  
**read:** Elias, "Sufi *Dhikr* Between Meditation and Prayer"; Sviri, "The Self and Its Transformation in Sufism" **[23 pages]**

## Week 12

M 11/23: American Academy of Religion Conference NO LAB  
**read:** research your final paper

T 11/24: American Academy of Religion Conference NO CLASS  
**read:** research your final paper

H 11/26: Thanksgiving Holiday NO CLASS

## §IV. Blazing New Paths

### Week 13: The Influence of Contemplative Paths on Modern Psychology

M 11/30: **LAB:** TBA

T 12/1: The Neuroscience of Contemplative Practices and Experiences (W. Britton + J. Davis)  
**read:** Davis and Vago, "Can Enlightenment Be Traced to Specific Neural Correlates?"; Lumma, Kok, & Singer, "Is Meditation Always Relaxing?"; Wilber, "The Spectrum of Development, Part I," pp. 65-83; Wilber, various maps and charts; **[25 pages]**

H 12/3: Individual research meetings with Dr. Lindahl

### Week 14: Conclusions

M 12/7: **NO LAB**

T 12/8: Final Discussion  
**read:** none, work on final paper

H 12/10: Presentations of Student Research

### Week 15: Reading Period

M 12/14: Presentations of Student Research

T 12/15: Presentations of Student Research

H 12/17: **NO CLASS** (work on final paper)

## *Course Policies and Perspectives*

### On Contemplative Studies and Critical First-Person Methodologies

Contemplative Studies is an emerging interdisciplinary academic discipline that aims to investigate the history, discourses, and methods of cognitive, affective, and ethical self-transformation. This course introduces students to some of the contemplative practices, experiences, and discourses that can be found in historical and contemporary religious traditions, where they serve as means of transforming the practitioner's physical, cognitive, affective, and ethical faculties—and usually in relation to a specific conception of salvation. As a means of understanding these traditions, students in this course will employ third-person (“objective”), second-person (“intersubjective”), and critical first-person (“subjective” or “experiential”) methodologies.

Because this course includes experiential learning through critical first-person and intersubjective second-person perspectives, it is essential to reflect upon the potential difficulties of bringing this data to bear on our understanding of contemplative traditions. *Critically* engaging these practices and traditions from first-person perspectives requires being aware of the unquestioned assumptions, biases, opinions, and motives that could potentially distort our understanding of our own experience. It is also particularly important to reflect upon how and why the appropriation or reconceptualization of contemplative practices and experiences from other cultural contexts can lead to an ungrounded and uncritical romanticism. Because we are seeking to acquire a nuanced understanding of contemplative practices, discourses, and experiences, claims from personal experience carry no *unique* weight or authority in this course, just as members of religious traditions within their own cultural contexts often critically interrogate experience-based claims.

### On Attendance & Participation

This course places a central importance and value on intersubjective second-person approaches to learning. Consequently, attendance in class and participation in class discussions and group activities is *absolutely essential*. In order to be able to participate in these discussions and activities, you must come to class prepared—that is, you are expected to carefully read any assigned materials *and bring those materials with you to class*, and you are expected to carefully and thoroughly complete all assignments on time. If you bring a laptop computer, it is expected that you will use it only for class-related activities such as accessing assigned texts and note-taking.

Because participation factors into your final grade, *each* unexcused absence will have an effect on this portion of your grade. Missing more than four class sessions throughout the semester will result in the forfeiture of the entirety of your participation grade. Missing six or more class sessions will result in failure of the course. Because of their central importance to the course and because there are comparatively few of them, missing one of the practice labs counts for two absences. Please be particularly punctual when arriving to contemplative practice labs!

### On Late Work

Out of fairness to your classmates, and because managing your time wisely and accomplishing academic work punctually are essential skills to cultivate, assignments handed in past the due date will be penalized. The self-reflection journal and papers will be assessed a grade reduction of one letter grade per day late. With proper documentation, certain exceptions will be approved (e.g., athletics, approved extra-curricular activities, serious illness, funerals). If you anticipate needing to hand in an assignment late, please let me know in advance. No exceptions will be granted for work-related obligations.

## On Plagiarism

Plagiarism—the passing off of someone else’s ideas and/or writing as your own—is a serious academic offense and will not be tolerated in this class. Any assignment found to be plagiarized will receive a failing grade. Violations of academic honesty will also be reported to the Case Administrator of the Academic Code. If you are unsure how to properly cite a source in your writing, please see me or consult a tutor at the Writing Center.

## *Resources*

### Writing Center

The Writing Center is located at J. Walter Wilson Room 213, where you will find a well-trained crew of tutors ready to assist you with your papers for this class. The Writing Center is open Monday – Thursday, 2pm – 8pm. They can assist you in the pre-writing process as well as in revising an existing draft. Please be sure that you bring a copy of the assignment and a copy of any work you have started. Schedule your sessions online at <http://www.brown.edu/academics/college/support/writing-center/appointments/appointments>

### Accessibilities Services

Any student needing academic accommodations on account of a disability should contact the Student and Employees Accessibilities Services (SEAS) office by email ([SEAS@brown.edu](mailto:SEAS@brown.edu)) or phone (401-863-9588) to request a SEAS Registration form and Documentation Guidelines.

### Counseling and Psychological Services

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) is open by appointment M-F 8am–4pm during the summer to provide any counseling you might need. Please call 401-863-3476 to make an appointment. For an emergency drop-in session, please go directly to office at J. Walter Wilson Room 516 or call the number listed above.

The various chaplains of Brown University are also available for counsel. Their contact information can be found at <http://www.brown.edu/campus-life/spiritual-life/chaplains/about/people>. Additionally, please feel free to talk with me if you are trying to figure out what services you need or how to obtain those services.

### Note on Contemplative Practices and Mental Health

By enrolling in this class, you agree to take responsibility for your own physical and mental well being by recognizing the limitations of these contemplative practices and the limits of your own physical, mental, and emotional faculties.

### Final Disclaimers

The promotion of particular religious beliefs or practices is not an objective of this course. Rather, we will investigate contemplative traditions through critical first-person methodologies in order to better understand the potential importance, relevance, and value these traditions have had and continue to have for communities of human beings both within and beyond religious traditions. Should you become unable or unwilling to engage in the experiential learning dimension of this course, alternate assignments will be arranged.