Real conversation occurs only when the participants allow the question, the subject matter, to assume primacy. It occurs only when our usual fears about our own self-image die: whether that fear is expressed in either arrogance or scrupulosity matters little. That fear dies only because we are carried along, and sometimes away, by the subject matter itself into the rare event or happening named “thinking” and “understanding.” For understanding happens; it occurs not as the pure result of personal achievement but in the back-and-forth movement of the conversation itself.

—David Tracy, The Analogical Imagination, 101

Course Description: Emphasizing peer-directed conversation, this course is a seminar on mystical experience from a historical contextualist, textual and comparative perspective. The course focuses on diverse and representative forms of mystical experience from the world’s major religious traditions. Mysticism involves an experience of that which a given individual or religious community identifies as “sacred” or “ultimately real.” From the perspective of mystics, mystical experience involves a direct experience of a trans-human reality, an interaction between an individual and/or communal subject and a sacred dimension. This course will familiarize students with the comparative study of such anomalous events in specific religious traditions and in specific socio-historical contexts. We will study these through a variety of means: by reading and discussing primary texts in translation, by conversing with guest-speakers about specific religious traditions, and by learning from each other. At times, we will discuss theological and soteriological issues in the study of , while at other times we will confront the applicability of the term “mysticism” to certain individuals and traditions. We will also examine major interpretative issues in Mysticism Studies.

Course Objectives: To familiarize students with the breadth and diversity of mystical experiences as expressed in key primary texts from most of the major religious traditions (Buddhism, Christianity, Daoism, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism). To consider the radical divergence of views of the “sacred” in the history of religions. To read and contemplate some of the most profound and, at times, the most neglected literature in human history. To think critically about the place of mystical experience in the lives of specific adherents and religious communities as well as about the diverse interpretations of such anomalous events.

Learning Outcomes: Committed, engaged and motivated students will be able to explain and analyze the categories, concerns, doctrines, symbols, and practices of various world religions, including critical methods for analyzing the content of religious texts (USD 1, 2, 9 & 10; THRS 1). Such students also will be able to explain and apply at least two methodologies and research techniques that are standard in the fields of theology and religion, such as anthropological, comparative, hermeneutical, historical, literary, phenomenological, philosophical, psychological and sociological approaches (USD 1 & 4; THRS 2). In addition, through major writing projects and group presentations, students will develop oral and written communication skills (USD 7; THRS 3 & 4).
Prerequisite: This course assumes a working understanding of various world religions. Specifically, enrolled students are expected to have completed the required prerequisite: either THRS 110: Exploring Religious Meaning or THRS 112: Introduction to World Religions. Students who have not fulfilled the prerequisite or who have not received prior instructor permission should drop the course.

Approaches to Teaching and Learning: The primary pedagogy utilized in this course is peer-directed teaching and learning. Interactive lecturing and discussion are the norm. Some class periods will involve formal and semi-formal lectures, but such sessions will informed by student questions and insights. Other class periods will be set aside for full-class and small-group discussions. Every student will have the opportunity to participate in a group, which will be responsible for the corresponding week. Generally speaking, class organization will be determined by the group with consultation and models provided by the instructor. A typical pattern involves formal lecture and discussion during the first meeting of a given week, followed by more open conversation about the primary text during the second meeting. Students are also encouraged to use innovative and engaging teaching methods (e.g., multimedia for Hildegard of Bingen). This class thus utilizes subject-centered and student-centered approaches to learning. Student engagement and participation are strongly encouraged. With respect to gaining the envisioned proficiency, four primary dimensions are essential and will ensure comprehension and accomplishment: (1) Class lectures and student-directed discussion; (2) Office visits; (3) Personal reading and study outside of class; and (4) Peer meetings and study sessions. That is, true study and learning are not simply a matter of class attendance.

Course Requirements: Consistent class attendance, familiarity with assigned readings, intellectual engagement, and participation. Your grade will be based on the following assignments and corresponding points:

- Biography Sheet: -5% if not turned in at the beginning of the second day of class*
- Attendance, Participation, and Spiritual Autobiography: 25%
- Reader-Responses (4) or Research Paper (25 pages): 25%
- Group Presentation: 25%
- Final Exam: 25%

These assignments have been designed with the intention of providing balanced evaluation. They include assignments based on knowledge acquisition, critical reflection, nuanced interpretation, analytical writing, and so forth. Your grade will be partially determined by your own self-evaluation and by the evaluation of the members of your group. We will review and discuss each assignment before it is due. See “Evaluation” section below and “Class Guidelines” handout, as well as the “Reader-Response Questions” and “Group Presentation Guidelines” handouts.

Required Readings: Please bring the relevant reading assignment to class.

A three-ringed binder and personal copies of PDF files from Blackboard/Olé (ole.sandiego.edu/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp), especially the primary texts. This is considered a course textbook. You also have permission to use E-readers (e.g., iPads, Kindles, Nooks, etc.; but not laptops) for class discussions focusing on Blackboard articles.

All of the course readings may be found on Blackboard/ Olé, and you will need to bring personal copies of the readings indicated by “print.” This is essential because we will do close readings of the primary texts. As there are no textbooks, your additional course expenses will be incurred from printing. Please note that some of the readings have illustrations, so they will require a fair amount of ink.

* Please note that this assignment does not contradict USD’s policy barring assignments amounting to 10% of a student’s grade during the add/drop period; that policy is intended for students adding courses late. For students enrolled in my classes who miss the first class meeting, there is a make-up assignment. In addition to the Biosheet, such students must complete a five-page summary of the syllabus and Class Guidelines. These assignments are due in hard-copy form at the beginning of the second class meeting.
In order to ensure greater student presence and interpersonal exchange, I do not allow laptops in the classroom, but this semester I am allowing e-readers. You will need actual hard-copies of the primary texts in translation or PDF versions for the relevant class meetings.

**Evaluation:** You are responsible for reviewing, understanding, and keeping all matters outlined in this syllabus and in any other handouts. I assign grades based on my years of experience in evaluating assignments, the *quality of your presence* in the class, the *criteria* for each assignment, the *quality of your work*, and the *quality of your work in relationship to the work of other students* in the class. I also consider evidence of progress made throughout the semester. If you wish to schedule an office visit to discuss grades, please read the corresponding policy documents on my personal website.

**Attendance.** Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class. Students receive a total of two unexcused absences, or one week of classes, for the entire semester. This commences on the first day of official registration. For each additional absence, two points are deducted from one’s attendance and participation grade. After five such absences, students forfeit the entirety of their attendance and participation grade (25%). The only acceptable reasons for excused absences are officially-recognized religious holidays, university-exempt activities (e.g., sports), medically-documented illness (a doctor’s note is required), or family emergencies. Arriving to class late, leaving class early, or leaving the classroom during class will adversely affect your attendance grade. Two such behavior patterns amount to one unexcused absence. This and similar policies are in place to inhibit potential distractions, to maintain an optimal learning environment.

You do not need to notify me about unexcused absences. However, if a major issue arises during the semester, please contact me as soon as possible.

**Participation.** The points associated with your attendance and participation grade are earned, not given. Participation includes active participation in class discussions. Attentiveness and engagement are as important as verbal expression. You are also strongly encouraged to ask questions and to seek clarification. Disrespectful behavior (e.g., talking to classmates during lectures or presentations) will adversely affect your participation grade.

**Spiritual Autobiography.** One dimension of this course involves investigating and discussing religious experience and mystical experience. You will have the opportunity to write your own “spiritual autobiography,” or an account of significant events in your own life related to meaning and purpose. This personal narrative and reflection must be at least two pages in length; there is no maximum length restriction. It is due on Monday, November 11. Your account will be treated as confidential and will not be shared with anyone. We will have an open conversation on this Monday with a self-described contemplative and mystic, who also is in the process of writing her own spiritual autobiography.

**Assignments.** All assignments must be handed in on time. Again, the only exception made in this regard involves university-exempt activities, documented illness or family emergency. Exams must be taken on the scheduled date. There will be no make-up exams. There also will be no incompletes. Please keep this in mind as you determine your level of commitment to the class.

For additional guidance see “Class Guidelines” handout.

**Writing Assignments:** If you choose the reader-response writing assignment, you are responsible for completing a reader-response questionnaire for four of the nine major topics covered; you should write two responses on the first five mystical texts (Topics III-VI, VIII) and two on the last four (Topics IX-X, XII, XIV). If you would prefer to divide the responses in a different way, please discuss this with me. You must receive pre-approval early in the semester. Reader-response papers are due in hard-copy form at the beginning of the relevant meeting period. This is necessary for two reasons. First, this is a seminar-style class, which requires everyone to be prepared for class discussion. Second, the semester will move quickly, which necessitates us to maintain consistent progress. These reader-response papers should be concise and relatively brief, roughly one page or 250 words per question. As there are six questions, this amounts to a total of approximately twenty-four pages of writing for the semester. My own critical outlines will be posted on my website so that you may compare responses after the assignment is returned. You may access them at the following link: <www.sandiego.edu/~komjathy> under “Materials.”
If you choose to write a research paper, which is an *alternative writing assignment* to the reader-responses, you will write a 25-page research paper on some dimension of mysticism. This paper must constitute a major research project, including substantial independent study. Potential topics must receive prior approval from me, and anyone choosing this assignment must make his/her decision, in consultation with me, by Monday, October 7. There are three elements to the assignment: (1) Formal topic proposal (due Monday, October 7); (2) Paper introduction, paper outline, and annotated bibliography (due Monday, October 28); and (3) Final version of completed paper (due Monday, December 9). This assignment is only recommended for highly-motivated and self-directed students. The final paper will be due *in hard-copy form at the beginning of class* on Monday, December 9 and will constitute 25% of your grade.

Late reader responses and research papers will receive a half grade deduction for each day after the due date. This means that if you started out with a “B”, you will receive a “C+” if the paper is one day late. There will be no rewrites.

Engagement with and citation of primary sources will serve you well. *Cite your sources. Do not engage in plagiarism.* In order to avoid potential issues related to the latter, I recommend that you check your paper through Turnitin.com.

With regard to formal features, papers must be type-written, double-spaced and printed in a clearly-legible style. Use a 12-point font and at least 1” margins. Choose a standard system of citation (APA, Chicago Manual of Style, MLA, etc.) and remain consistent in using it. Papers should be stapled, with your name, the date, the class, and the assignment at the beginning of the paper. An exceptional paper will have a title that both engages and orients the reader.

No religious tradition should be taken as normative, as the standard by which all other religions are judged. At times it may be appropriate to use the subjective voice (“I”), but in all cases avoid apologetic and confessional language.

For additional guidance see “Class Guidelines” handout. See also the “Paper Grading Rubric” and “Citation Methods” documents on my personal website. There you will also find examples of successful student papers.

**Email and Office Phone:** I usually check these throughout the week and only rarely on weekends. The exception to the latter is when assignments are due or when exams are scheduled. Please keep these details in mind when asking for a response to a question or notifying me of a sickness or emergency.
COURSE OUTLINE

As this is the inaugural offering of this course, we may need to make amendments to the syllabus and schedule during the semester. Such changes will be discussed and/or communicated before they are made. Please be amenable and flexible should this become necessary. I also welcome your recommendations for improving the course.

I. Preliminary Orientations (Wednesday, September 4-Monday, September 9)
   Wednesday, September 4: Course Overview
   Monday, September 9: What is Religion? What is Mysticism?
      REQUIRED READING: Blackboard Readings 01: “Mysticism”
      Additional Assignment: Online Learning Style Assessment
      1. Memletics Learning Style Inventory (www.learning-styles-online.com)
      2. Keirsey Temperament Sorter (www.keirsey.com)

      ***MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 9—BIO-SHEET DUE***
      ***MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 9—MEMLETTICS SURVEY DUE***

II. Interpretative Issues (Wednesday, September 11-Monday, September 16)
   Wednesday, September 11: Interpreting Mystical Experience
   Monday, September 16: Interpreting Mystical Experience
      REQUIRED READING: Blackboard Readings 02: Two articles from Interpretive Issues Readings

III. Jewish Mysticism: Merkabah (Wednesday, September 18-Monday, September 23)
   Wednesday, September 18: Rabbinic Judaism and Merkabah (Palace/Throne) Mysticism
   Monday, September 24: Close Reading and Discussion of Pirkei Hekhalot (Chapters on the Ascent)
      REQUIRED READING: Blackboard Readings 03: “Merkabah” Readings
      PRIMARY TEXT: Chapters on the Ascent
      PRINT: Chapters on the Ascent

      ***WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, READER-RESPONSE ON MERKABAH MYSTICISM DUE***

IV. Christian Mysticism I: Pseudo-Dionysius (Wednesday, September 25-Monday, September 30)
   Wednesday, September 25: Syrian Christianity, Neo-Platonism, and Dionysius the Areopagite
   Monday, September 30: Close Reading and Discussion of Peri Mustikes Theologias (The Mystical Theology)
      REQUIRED READING: Blackboard Readings 04: “Pseudo-Dionysius” Readings
      PRIMARY TEXT: The Mystical Theology
      PRINT: The Mystical Theology

      ***WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, READER-RESPONSE ON PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS DUE***

V. Christian Mysticism II: Hildegard of Bingen (Wednesday, October 2-Monday, October 7)
   Wednesday, October 2: Catholic Christianity, Order of Saint Benedict, and Hildegard of Bingen
   Monday, October 7: Close Reading and Discussion of Scito vias Domini (Know the Ways of the Lord; abbrev. Scivias)
      REQUIRED READING: Blackboard Readings 05: “Hildegard” Readings
      PRIMARY TEXT: Know the Ways of the Lord
      PRINT: Know the Ways of the Lord
VI. Christian Mysticism III: Meister Eckhart (Wednesday, October 9-Monday, October 14)
Wednesday, October 9: Catholic Christianity, Order of the Preachers (Dominicans), and Meister Eckhart
Monday, October 14: Close Reading and Discussion of German Sermons and “On Detachment”
REQUIRED READING: Blackboard Readings 06: “Eckhart” Readings
PRIMARY TEXT: German Sermons and “On Detachment”
PRINT: German Sermons and “On Detachment”

***WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 9, READER-RESPONSE ON MEISTER ECKHART DUE***

VII. Open Discussion (Wednesday, October 16)
COMPARATIVE CONVERSATION

VIII. Islamic Mysticism: Rūmī (Monday, October 21-Wednesday, October 23)
Monday, October 21: Islam, Sufism, and Rūmī
Wednesday, October 23: Close Reading and Discussion of the Dīwān-i Shams-i Tabīzī (Collected Poems of Shams of Tabriz)
REQUIRED READING: Blackboard Readings 08: “Rumi” Readings
PRIMARY TEXT: Collected Poems of Shams of Tabriz
PRINT: Collected Poems of Shams of Tabriz

***MONDAY, OCTOBER 21, READER-RESPONSE ON RUMI DUE***

IX. Daoist Mysticism I: Neiye 内業 (Inward Training) (Monday, October 28-Wednesday, October 30)
Monday, October 28: Classical Daoism, Inner Cultivation Lineages, and the Inward Training
Wednesday, October 30: Close Reading and Discussion of the Inward Training
REQUIRED READING: Blackboard Readings 09: “Neiye” Readings
PRIMARY TEXT: Inward Training
PRINT: Inward Training

***MONDAY, OCTOBER 28, READER-RESPONSE ON INWARD TRAINING DUE***

X. Daoist Mysticism II: Xisheng jing 西昇經 (Scripture on the Western Ascension) (Monday, November 4-Wednesday, November 6)
Monday, November 4: Early Medieval Daoism, Louguan tai 樓觀台 (Lookout Tower Monastery), and the Scripture on the Western Ascension
Wednesday, November 6: Close Reading and Discussion of the Scripture on the Western Ascension
REQUIRED READING: Blackboard Readings 10: “Xishengjing” Readings
PRIMARY TEXT: Scripture on the Western Ascension
PRINT: Scripture on the Western Ascension

***MONDAY, NOVEMBER 4, READER-RESPONSE ON SCRIPTURE ON THE WESTERN ASCENSION DUE***

XI: Discussion of Personal Religious Experience (Monday, November 11)
GUEST SPEAKER: BEVERLY LANZETTA
REQUIRED READING: Blackboard Readings 11: “The Days of Awe”

***MONDAY, NOVEMBER 11, SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY DUE***
XII. Buddhist Mysticism: Dōgen 道元 (Wednesday, November 13-Monday, November 18)

Wednesday, November 13: Zen Buddhism, the Soto Lineage, and Dōgen

Monday, November 18: Close Reading and Discussion of the Shōbōgenzō 正法眼藏 (Treasury of the True Dharma-Eye)

REQUIRED READING: Blackboard Reading 12: “Dogen” Readings
PRIMARY TEXT: Treasury of the True Dharma-Eye
PRINT: Treasury of the True Dharma-Eye

***WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 13, READER-RESPONSE ON DOGEN DUE***

XIII. Open Discussion (Wednesday, November 20)

COMPARATIVE CONVERSATION

***MONDAY, NOVEMBER 25: NO CLASS—AAR CONFERENCE***
***WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 27: NO CLASS—THANKSGIVING BREAK***

XIV. Hindu Mysticism: Śaṅkara (Monday, December 2-Wednesday, December 4)

Monday, December 2: Early Medieval Hinduism, Advaita Vedanta, and Śaṅkara (Shankara)

Wednesday, December 4: Close Reading and Discussion of the Viveka-chudamani (Crest-Jewel of Discrimination)

REQUIRED READING: Blackboard Reading 14: “Shankara” Readings
PRIMARY TEXT: Crest-Jewel of Discrimination
PRINT: Crest-Jewel of Discrimination

***MONDAY, DECEMBER 2, READER-RESPONSE ON SHANKARA DUE***

XV. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION & COURSE REVIEW (Monday, December 9-Wednesday, December 11)

***MONDAY, DECEMBER 9—RESEARCH PAPER DUE***
***FRIDAY, DECEMBER 13—LAST DAY OF CLASS***

FINALS WEEK: MONDAY, DECEMBER 16-FRIDAY, DECEMBER 20

***MONDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2:00PM-4:00PM—FINAL EXAMINATION***
COURSE SCHEDULE CHANGES
Any amendment to the course schedule will be announced in class. If you are absent from class, it is your
responsibility to contact class members or me until you receive such information concerning changes.

SPECIAL NEEDS
If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, if you have emergency medical
information to share with me, or if you need special arrangements in the event of a building evacuation,
please speak with me.

CORE CURRICULUM REQUIREMENT
This course fulfills 1 of the 3 USD Core Curriculum requirements in Theology and Religious Studies. If
you have any specific questions regarding university requirements or THRS requirements, please speak
with me or with Judith Liu, Interim Chair, Department of Theology and Religious Studies.

ACADEMIC HONESTY
The university’s policy on academic honesty will be strictly enforced in this course. Plagiarism,
cheating, and stealing or defacement of library materials will result in automatic failure of the
course.

IMPORTANT DEADLINES
September 13: Add/drop with full refund.
November 6: Pass/fail filing.
November 13: Withdraw from class.