

Gallatin School of Individualized Study  
New York University

Office hours:  
W 10 to 12, and 1 to 4

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## MYSTICISM FALL 2008

Mysticism, in its pure form, is the science of ultimates,  
the science of union with the Absolute, and nothing else . . .  
the mystic is the person who attains to this union,  
not the person who talks about it.

Not to *know about*, but to *Be*, is the mark of the real initiate.  
-- Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism*

To attempt to study and understand mysticism and mystical experience is to reach into the heart of the religious experience of humanity. Direct, personal, intense, and often life-changing, mystical experience alters the way one views and understands self, life, and the world; it lies at the root of all of the world's great religious traditions. This course pursues two parallel paths in our attempt to comprehend mysticism. We will read and talk about theoretical texts that interpret the mystical experience from psychological, philosophical, and neurobiological points of view, and we will distinguish among perennialist, constructivist, and other perspectives. We will also encounter a number of primary texts by some of the "classic mystics," those who have attained as well as talked about the experience.

### **Books:**

Andrew Harvey, *The Essential Mystics*  
Stephen Mitchell, *The Enlightened Heart*  
Robert K.C. Forman, *Mysticism, Mind, Consciousness*  
Newberg and D'Aquili, *Why God Won't Go Away*  
Additional readings, available on reserve at Bobst or online

### **Class process:**

This course is centered on careful reading and discussion of texts. Read each assigned text before class, bring the text to class, and be ready to write and talk about it, and to listen to others' perspectives. Be prepared to reveal your questions and ideas, and to create a safe space for others to do so as well.

## Requirements:

1) *A short meeting with me in my office during the first few weeks of class.* I would like to get to know each of you personally, so please see me after class or email me to make a time to get together. Thanks!

2) *Preparation, attendance, and participation.* Allow at least four or five hours each week for reading class materials, reflecting, and writing. Please come to class on time; lateness, absence, or non-participation affect the work of the whole group. Say something in every class, even if you just ask a “simple question.” Let me know before class (call or email) if you won’t be able to be there. I may ask you to make a short presentation or to help facilitate the class, if you are interested.

3) *Informal writing assignments, quizzes, postings to the class Bboard.* Writing will be assigned frequently throughout the semester, some in-class and some outside, some graded, some not. You need to fulfill all writing assignments on time for them to “count” toward your grade. No make-up assignments. Reading quizzes may happen.

4) *Four short papers, due 9/23, 10/7, 10/28, and 11/11.* Papers will consist of a 1- page personal response to the selected readings for the day plus a 2-3 page essay on **one** of the selections. You are encouraged to do research to help with these essays, but you must provide full documentation for any facts, interpretations, ideas, or language that you find in your sources.

5) *Take-home exam due November 18.* Instructions available 11/11.

6) *Final project, due December 9.* Your “Mysticism Book” or other creative project, a product of your inquiry and experiences over the course of the semester. Experimentation and individualization encouraged. Projects will be presented in class.

## Grading:

Attendance, participation, quizzes, etc.	20 %
Short papers (10 % each)	40 %
Take-home exam	30 %
Final project	10 %

## Policies:

1) *Plagiarism* (using other people’s words, ideas, or forms of organization without giving full credit) is a serious offense. I will give you a handout defining plagiarism; please read it and follow the rules on academic honesty. Plagiarism, whether intentional or not, can result in an F in a paper or in the course, and must be reported to the dean. Trust your own thinking and writing; they are the best way of expressing what you are learning, and they are what I look forward to reading! 2) Grades of “incomplete” are only for medical and other documented emergencies and must be requested in writing, on the Gallatin “incomplete” form.

# MYSTICISM

## FALL 2008

<i>Date</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Assignment</i>
9/2	Introduction to the course	
9/9	Perennialist and constructivist theories about mysticism.	Stace, "What Is Mysticism?" (on Blackboard and at Bobst) and Katz, "Mysticism, Language, Epistemology" (at Bobst)
9/16	Another theoretical possibility. Introduction to Judaism.	Forman, chapters 1, 2, 3, 5
9/23	Jewish mysticism, or Kabbalah.	<i>Essential Mystics</i> , chapter 5. <b>Short paper 1 due.</b>
9/30	More about Forman's view. Introduction to Buddhism.	Forman, chapters 6 to 10
10/7	Buddhist mysticism	<i>Essential Mystics</i> , chapter 4. <b>Short paper 2 due.</b>
(10/14)	<i>No class</i>	
10/21	A neuroscientific view. Introduction to Islam.	<i>Why God Won't Go Away</i> , 1 to 5
10/28	Islamic mysticism, or Sufism.	<i>Essential Mystics</i> , chapter 7. <b>Short paper 3 due.</b>
11/4	More on neuroscience. Introduction to Taoism.	Finish <i>Why God Won't Go Away</i> .
11/11	Taoist mysticism.	<i>Essential Mystics</i> , chapter 2. <b>Short paper 4 due.</b>
11/18	Stepping back to see the big picture.	<b>Take- home exam due</b>
11/25	TBA	
12/2	Field trip	<b>Plan for final project due, by email.</b>
12/9		<b>Final projects due, with short class presentations.</b>