

2012

RELI-350-02 Comparative Studies in Religion

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Recommended Citation

Jarow, E H., "RELI-350-02 Comparative Studies in Religion" (2012). *Syllabi*. Paper 21.
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Religion 350

Tantra: The Serpent Power

Fall 2012 Vassar College

E. H. Jarow

Monday 3:10pm-5:10pm BH 201

Office Hours: Wednesday 2:00-4:00 and by appointment

(Blodgett 103, x5516, email: jarow)

The Seminar:

This Seminar focuses on the visionary faculties, the process of self-observation, and the realms of contemplative imagination. It explores the tantric tradition through the metaphor of the serpent, which is at once a symbol for the coiled kundalini energy at the base of the spine that can rise through the practice of yoga; and for chthonic powers often labelled as “impure,” “inferior” or “dangerous” by mainstream religious traditions. The seminar considers aspects of tantra in its textual context through a close reading of the *Sat Chakra Nirupana* as well as through contemporary lenses of depth psychology and mytho-poetic studies. This seminar is above all, experiential. It involves hands-on meditative and visionary practice and requires students to open to personal engagement (working with the text of one’s own life) and modalities of perception that involve imagistic association, awareness of feelings in relation to dream and hypnogogic imagery, noting synchronicities between waking and dream experience, meditation, and visionary incubation practices. This practicum component of the seminar includes the crafting of “inscape” journals, and vision-dream-weaving in smaller groups. Seminar participants need to be committed to all aspects of the course.

Course Requirements:

- 1) *Regular Attendance* and careful reading of assigned material. Since this seminar only meets once a week, anyone who misses more than one class without a doctor's note cannot receive a passing grade. This includes eight “vision labs” in which students work in smaller groups outside of class time. There are also two guest lectures.
- 2) *Response Papers* that raise specific questions and issues to be considered in class (1-2 pages due Friday night on the Vassar Moodle). You are required to write four papers over the semester.
- 3) *Inscape Journal* containing records of dreams, associations, interpretations, drawings, poems, and other forms of inner work to be handed in once before the mid-term and once at the end of the semester.
- 5) *Final Research Paper or Project* to be completed by December 1, using at least ten different

bibliographical sources and presented in class (15-25pp).

6) *Participation in “Inner Work Group”* and attendance at the practicum sessions.

Required Books

Avalon, Arthur. *The Serpent Power: The Secrets of Tantric and Shaktic Yoga*
Urban, Hugh. *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics, and Power in the Study of Religion*
White, *Tantra in Practice*
Bittlinger, *Archetypal Chakras*

September 10: Introduction: The Serpent Power

Defining Characteristics of Tantra
History and a-History of Tantra

September 17: The Chakra System: A Cross Cultural Perspective

Reading: Urban, *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics, and Power in the Study of Religion*,
Selections from the Introduction (On Moodle Reserve)
Avalon, Chapter 1-2
Bettinger pp. 3-10,

September 24: This Body is the Very Lotus Land of Purity

Reading: Avalon, Chapter 3
White, “Tantra in South Asia (e-reserve)

Sept 26 Evening: Special Class/ Guest Facilitator: Ellen Watson (Esalen Institute)

October 1: The Six Chakras of Tantra

Reading: Avalon, 4,5 (6,7 peruse for reference)

October 8: Muladhara: The Root

Reading: *Sat Chakra Nirupana*, verses 1-13
Bettinger, pp. 35-40

October 22: Svadhisthana: The Waters of Creation

**Reading: Sat Chakra Nirupana, verses 14-18
Bettinger 41-52**

October 29: Manipura the City of Jewels

**Reading: Sat Chakra Nirupana, verses 19-21
Bettinger 52-64**

Nov 5: Anahata: The Unstruck Sound, Vishusuddha, Creativity as Perception

**Reading: Sat Chakra Nirupana, verses 22-31
Bettinger, 65-81**

November 12: Ajna and Sahasra: The further Reaches of Human Consciousness

**Readings: Sat Chakra Nirupana, verses 32-45
Bettinger, 82-91**

November 19: The Arts of Tantra

**Readings: Sat Chakra Nirupana, verses 46-55
Rawson, The Art of Tantra, Selections (e-reserve)**

Final Paper/Project Abstracts Due:

November 26, The Language of Tantra

**Readings: Coward, The Nature of Mantra
Padaux, Levels of Sacred Speech**

December 3: Tantra and Sexuality

Shaw, Liberating Sexuality

Final Paper/Project Due:

December 10, 11, 12: Final Presentations

Recommended Books

- Abhaydatta, *Masters of Mahamudra: songs and histories of the eighty four Buddhist Siddhas*. Translation and commentary, Keith Dowman, Illustrations Hugh r. Downs. (Albany [N.Y.] : State University of New York Press, c1985)
- Bharati, Agehananda. *The Tantric Tradition* (New York: Doubleday, 1970).
- Butterfield, Stephen. *The Double Mirror: A Skeptical Journey into Buddhist Tantra* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1994).
- Dalai Lama, Dzong-ka-ba, and Jeffrey Hopkins. *Yoga Tantra: Paths to Magical Feats* (Ithaca NY: Snow Lion, 2005).
- Dietrich, Angela. *Tantric Healing in the Kathmandu Valley* (Delhi: Book Faith India, 1998).
- Dyczkowski, Mark S. J. *A Journey in the World of the Tantras* (Varanasi: Indica, 2004).
- Dowman, Keith. *Masters of Mahamudra*.
- Gray, David B. *The Cakrasaṃvara Tantra (The Discourse on Śrī Heruka) (Śrītherukābhīdhāna)* (New York: American Institute of Buddhist Studies at Columbia University, Columbia's Center for Buddhist Studies, and Tibet House, 2007).
- Gopi Krishna, *The Awakening of Kundalini* (New York: Dutton, 1975)
- Lorenzen, David. *The Kāpālikas and Kālamukhas: Two Lost Śaivite Sects* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2002).
- Monroe, Robert. *Journeys Out of the Body*. (New York: Broadway Books, 1997)
- Muller-Ortega, Paul. "Tantric Meditation: Vocalic Beginnings," in Teun Goudriaan, ed., *Ritual and Speculation in Early Tantra*, pp. 227-45 (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1992).
- Padoux, André. *Vāc: The Concept of the Word in Selected Hindu Tantras*. Trans. by Jacques Gontier (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990).
- . "What Do We Mean by Tantrism?" In *The Roots of Tantra*, ed. Katherine Anne Harper and Robert L. Brown, pp. 17–24 (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002).
- Rawson, Philip. *The Art of Tantra* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1985).
- Sanderson, Alexis. "Maṇḍala and Agamic Identity in the Trika of Kashmir." In Padoux (ed.), *Mantras et diagrammes rituels dans l'Hindouisme*, pp. 169–219 (1986).
- . "Śaivism and the Tantric Tradition." In *The World's Religions*, ed. Stewart Sutherland, Leslie Houlden, Peter Clarke, and Friedhelm Hardy, pp. 660–704 (London: Routledge, 1988).
- . "A Commentary on the Opening Verses of the Tantrasāra of Abhinavagupta." In *Sāmarasya: Studies in Indian Arts, Philosophy, and Interreligious Dialogue in Honour of Bettina Bäumer*. Ed. By Sadananda Das and Ernst Furlinger, pp. 89-149 (New Delhi: D.K. Prindworld, 2005).
- . "The Śaiva Exegesis of Kashmir." In *Mélanges tantriques à la mémoire d'Hélène Brunner*.

Tantric Studies in Mamory of Hélène Brunner. Ed. By Dominic Goodall & André Padoux. pp. 231-442 (Pondicherry: École française d'Extrême Orient, 2007).

Saso, Michael. *Tantric Art and Meditation: The Tendai Tradition* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1991).

Silburn, Lilian. *Kuṇḍalinī: The Energy of the Depths* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988).

Smith, Frederick M. *The Self Possessed: Deity and Spirit Possession in Indian Literature and Civilization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

Strickmann, Michel. *Chinese Magical Medicine*. Ed. Bernard Faure (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

Svoboda, Robert E. *Aghora: At the Left Hand of God* (Albuquerque: Brotherhood of Life, 1986).

David Gordon White. *The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Medieval India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

-----, *Kiss of the Yogini: "Tantric Sex" in its South Asian Contexts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

-----, ed. *Tantra in Practice* (TP) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

Lama Yeshe. *Introduction to Tantra: The Transformation of Desire*. (Wisdom Pubs., 2001)

Gopikrishna, *The Awakening of Kundalini*

Vasistha, *Yogavasistha*

Films and Websites

<http://www.willa.com/dreams/dream2.htm>
www.mythopoesis.org