

## DZOGCHEN PROJECT WORKSHOP

Dzogchen is a Tibetan Buddhist contemplative tradition that emphasizes effortlessness as a key feature of its doctrinal architecture and meditative programme. Non-striving thus represents one of the central research questions examined in the “Dzogchen” project, which is sponsored by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research and is based at CERES (Center for Religious Studies) of the Ruhr-Universität Bochum. The present workshop seeks to explore this theme in a broader framework, by looking at it comparatively from the viewpoints of a number of religious traditions.

Many traditions of contemplative practice, whether they be Buddhist or of other religious origin, emphasize the need to purify the tendencies towards outer and inner forms of distraction. This leads to a state of (outward) solitude, which can (but need not necessarily) be temporarily and spatially delimited. Solitude thus provides a framework for actual contemplation or absorption, the central task of the contemplative life (= inner solitude). Although contemplation is usually presented as the result of a strenuous process of gradual renunciation and effort, the higher stages of contemplative practice often underscore the fact that wilful striving can be an obstacle to true contemplation. In such an optic, wilful striving eventually gives way to a suspension of effort and opens up to a state of inner letting-be.

The meaning (and the precise order) of this threefold structure (solitude – contemplation – letting-be) is presented differently according to various contemplative traditions. It provides a fruitful field for a comparative religious enquiry, one in which both the commonalities and differences between traditions of mystical praxis can be explored.

This workshop will provide a forum for experts to discuss this theme from the perspectives of the following traditions of mystical praxis: Dzogchen, Tantra, Mahāmudrā, Chan/Zen, Pure Land Buddhism, Daoism, Kashmiri Shaivism, Judaism, Christianity, and Sufism.

## VENUE

Online conference via Zoom.

## CONVENER

Dylan Esler | [dylan.esler@rub.de](mailto:dylan.esler@rub.de)

## ORGANIZATION

Center for Religious Studies, Ruhr-Universität Bochum  
Universitätsstr. 90a | 44789 Bochum | Germany | Tel: +49 234 32-28618

## FUNDING

Sponsored by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research

SPONSORED BY THE



Federal Ministry of Education and Research

## CONTACT

Participation is by invitation only, but interested scholars who would like to join the workshop as observers may contact the organizers. Places are limited, so please register early. Final deadline for registration: **Friday, 17 September 2021.**

If you would like to participate in the workshop as an observer, please contact: **Vivien Staps** | [vivien.staps@rub.de](mailto:vivien.staps@rub.de)

RUB



[Ulee\\_wu\\_Tibet\\_landscape\\_Public/6776832664\\_8cf0113b84\\_k\\_https://www.flickr.com/photos/13523064@N03/6776832664/in/photostream/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/13523064@N03/6776832664/in/photostream/)

RUHR-UNIVERSITÄT BOCHUM

Dzogchen Project Workshop

# CONTEMPLATION AND NON-DOING: SOLITUDE, ABSORPTION AND LETTING-BE AS STRUCTURAL PRINCIPALS OF CONTEMPLATIVE RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

22–24 September 2021 | CERES | Online Conference  
Convener: Dylan Esler



## Contemplation and Non-Doing: Solitude, Absorption and Letting-be as Structural Principals of Contemplative Religious Practice

### Please note:

All times are given in CEST (Central European Summer Time, i.e. UTC+2), with EDT (Eastern Daylight Time, i.e. UTC-4) being provided additionally for convenience.

CEST-1hr = London (UK) time

CEST-6hrs = Richmond (Virginia) time (EDT)

### Wednesday, 22 September 2021

16:00–16:10 **Welcome Address**  
10:00–10:10 Volkhard Krech (CERES Director, Bochum)

16:10–16:20 **Brief Introduction to Dzogchen Project**  
10:10–10:20 Dylan Esler (Bochum)

16:20–16:30 **Introduction to the Online Journal *Entangled Religions***  
10:20–10:30 Thomas Jurczyk (Bochum)

16:30–17:45 **Keynote Speech**  
10:30–11:45 **The Complexity of Effort, Effortlessness, and Agency in Tibetan Great Perfection Contemplative Practices** (60 min.)  
David Germano (Charlottesville, VA)

Discussion (15 min.)

17:45–open end **Virtual meeting space for participants**  
11:45–open end

### Thursday, 23 September 2021

Session I Chair: Jan-Ulrich Sobisch (Bochum)

14:30–15:00 **A New Look at Chinese Chan and Tibetan Dzogchen**  
08:30–09:00 (20 min.)  
Carmen Meinert (Project Leader, Dzogchen Project, Bochum)\*

Discussion (10 min.)



15:00–15:30 **On the Concept of Effortlessness and Non-activity in Medieval Chinese Buddhist Practice** (20 min.)  
09:00–09:30 Henrik H. Sørensen (Bochum)\*

Discussion (10 min.)

15:30–16:00 **Śaiva-Śakta Meditation as Expanded Awareness** (20 min.)  
09:30–10:00 Gavin Flood (Oxford)

Discussion (10 min.)

16:00–16:50 **Tea break & Virtual meeting space**  
10:00–10:50

Session II Chair: Carmen Meinert (Bochum)\*

16:50–17:20 **“Nothing to be Practiced:” Metaphor and Paradox in Tibetan Mahāmudrā Instructions** (20 min.)  
10:50–11:20 Jan-Ulrich Sobisch (Bochum)

Discussion (10 min.)

17:20–17:50 **Contemplating Solitude in Jewish Spiritual and Mystical Literature** (20 min.)  
11:20–11:50 Patrick Benjamin Koch (Hamburg)

Discussion (10 min.)

17:50–18:20 **Early Daoism, “Meditation”, and the Taxonomical Problem** (20 min.)  
11:50–12:20 Licia Di Giacinto (Bochum)

### Friday, 24 September 2021

Session III Chair: Henrik H. Sørensen (Bochum)\*

14:00–14:30 **Living the Pure Vision: The Four Phurpas and Effortless Practice** (20 min.)  
08:00–08:30 Cathy Cantwell (Oxford)

Discussion (10 min.)



14:30–15:00 **Fundamental Aspects of Contemplation and Non-Doing in the Christian Tradition, as Presented by John of Ruusbroec** (20 min.)  
08:30–09:00 Rob Faesen (Leuven)

Discussion (10 min.)

15:00–15:30 **‘Non-Doing’ in English Mysticism** (20 min.)  
09:00–09:30 Louise Nelstrop (Oxford)

Discussion (10 min.)

15:30–16:20 **Tea break & Virtual meeting space**  
09:30–10:20

Session IV Chair: Licia Di Giacinto (Bochum)

16:20–16:50 **The Notion of ‘Effortlessness’ in the Dzogchen Commentaries by Nubchen Sangye Yeshe** (20 min.)  
10:20–10:50 Dylan Esler (Bochum)

Discussion (10 min.)

16:50–17:20 **Sufism as a Practice of Divine Nothingness** (20 min.)  
10:50–11:20 Alberto Fabio Ambrosio (Luxembourg)

Discussion (10 min.)

17:20–17:50 **A Hike or a Cruise? The Alternative of Pure Land Buddhism** (20 min.)  
11:20–11:50 Jérôme Ducor (Geneva)

Discussion (10 min.)

17:50–18:10 **Tea break**  
11:50–12:10

18:10–18:40 **Roundtable Discussion**  
12:10–12:40

18:40–19:00 **Concluding Remarks**  
12:40–13:00

\* = for ERC funded project BuddhistRoad