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 Estler

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 willful striving can be an obstacle to true contemplation. In such an optic, willful striving eventually gives way to a suspension of effort and opens up to a state of inner letting-be.

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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.

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.

Participants are invited to join the workshop, and 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
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

Wednesday, 22 September 2021

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

16:10–16:30 Brief Introduction to Dzogchen Project
Dylan Esler (Bochum)

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

11:45–open end 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 (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.)
Henrik H. Sørensen (Bochum)*

Discussion (10 min.)

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

Discussion (10 min.)

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

Friday, 24 September 2021

Session II Chair: Carmen Meinert (Bochum)*
16:00–16:50 "Nothing to be Practiced:" Metaphor and Paradox in Tibetan Mahāmudrā Instructions (20 min.)
Jan-Ulrich Sobisch (Bochum)

Discussion (10 min.)

16:50–17:20 Contemplating Solitude in Jewish Spiritual and Mystical Literature (40 min.)
Patrick Benjamin Koch (Hamburg)

Discussion (10 min.)

17:20–17:50 Early Daoism, "Meditation", and the Taxonomical Problem (20 min.)
Licia Di Giacinto (Bochum)

Discussion (10 min.)

17:50–18:20 A Hike or a Cruise? The Alternative of Pure Land Buddhism (20 min.)
Jérôme Ducor (Geneva)

Discussion (10 min.)

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

* = for ERC funded project BuddhistRoad