

Body Health and Religion Research Group (BAHAR) Events, April to June 2017

As many of you will know, Santi and I ran an informal research network, BAHAR, when we were living in the UK, and have been planning to revive it here now that we are established in Australia. This has taken longer than we are expected but we are organising two film evenings and a discussion meeting over the next few weeks. We will be overseas for much of the second half of 2017, but we hope to have a more substantial programme next year.

The films will be at our house in Ashfield, and the discussion meeting at the University of Sydney. Anyone is welcome to come to any of these meetings. You are of course very welcome just to come along and enjoy the films, and also to bring friends along (but let us know in advance by email or text so we have some idea of numbers, especially if you are coming for the dinner beforehand). We are starting with a classic recent Bangladeshi film from 2009, *Lal Shalu*.

Friday 28th April, dinner 7.30 p.m., film 8.30 p.m. BAHAR film evening. 23 Hugh St, Ashfield, NSW (5 min. from Ashfield station). **Lal Shalu**. This film, made in 2009 by the acclaimed Bangladeshi director Tanvir Mokammel, is based on a classic Bengali novel of the same name by Syed Waliullah (translated into English as *Tree Without Roots*). The plot deals with Majid, a Muslim holy man who arrives in a village and sets himself up as the caretaker of a local shrine. Over time, it becomes clear that Majid is not all that he seems.

Bring a plate if you would like to join us for an informal meal before the film; we will provide rice, dal and salad. RSVP by e-mail or to [0413 794 507](tel:0413794507).

Tuesday 9th May 2017, 4.30 p.m. BAHAR Meditation Research Group Woolley Seminar Room, N208, Woolley Building, University of Sydney. **Discussion: When Meditation Goes Wrong: Spiritual Emergencies and the Dark Night of the Soul.** I recently attended a conference in the USA where several of the papers dealt with meditation-induced trauma (e.g. severe dissociation, depersonalisation, etc). Not much has been written about this, but serious psychological problems appear to be relatively common across many different traditions, including Vipassana, Zen and Tibetan meditation in Buddhism. Episodes may be brief, but also can last for years and make it difficult for people to live a normal life. I'll give a short intro and summarise some of the material from the conference, to lead into a general open discussion about local experiences, and about how meditation teachers and others can best handle these situations. All welcome (not just people on the meditation research mailing list).

Friday 9th June, dinner 7.30 p.m., film 8.30 p.m. BAHAR film evening. 23 Hugh St, Ashfield, NSW (5 min from Ashfield station). **Crazy Wisdom: The Life and Times of Chogyam Trungpa**. This documentary explores the life, teachings, and "crazy wisdom" of Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, a pivotal figure in bringing Tibetan Buddhism to the West. Called a genius, rascal, and social visionary; 'one of the greatest spiritual teachers of the 20th century,' and 'the bad boy of Buddhism,' Trungpa defied categorization. Raised and trained in the rigorous Tibetan monastic tradition, Trungpa came to the West and shattered preconceived notions about how an enlightened teacher should behave - he openly smoked, drank, and had intimate

relations with students - yet his teachings have been highly influential, and regarded as authentic. Twenty years after his death, with unprecedented access and exclusive archival material, Crazy Wisdom looks at the man and the myths about him. Bring a plate if you would like to join us for an informal meal before the film; we will provide rice, dal and salad. RSVP by e-mail or to [0413 794 507](tel:0413794507).

Tuesday, 2nd May 2017: BAHAR members may also be interested in a seminar I am giving at Sydney University on 2nd May: **Relaxation, Arousal, Mindfulness, and Tantric Practice: How Different is Vajrayana Meditation?** Rogers Room, N397. Woolley Building, 4 to 5.30 p.m. Studies in Religion Research Seminar, co-hosted with Australasian Association of Buddhist Studies.

Much Western writing on Buddhist meditation, going back to Herbert Benson's early work on Tibetan *gtum-mo* practice, has focussed on relaxation as a central component. For Benson and his associates, the 'relaxation response' contrasted with the 'stress response' with its pathological effects. The opposition between stress and relaxation however arguably provides an inadequate basis for understanding the physiology of meditation. Recently, a new generation of researchers, including Maria Kozhevnikov, Willoughby Britton, Jared Lindahl, Jeffrey Lidke, Jeff Ruff, and others have argued for more complex models, involving both the sympathetic nervous system (associated with arousal) and the parasympathetic nervous system (associated with relaxation). This paper asks how far these arguments can assist us in sorting out the complexity and variety of Vajrayana and other Tibetan meditational practices. I discuss some of the main and accessory Vajrayana practices, including various types of *yidam* practice, *trulkor* yoga, Tantric dance (*cham*), and other physical disciplines, and the so-called completion stage practices of Anuttara Yoga Tantra, which including the *tummo* ('psychic heat') practices studied by both Benson and Kozhevnikov. Along what organismic pathways might such practices guide the transformations of physiology and consciousness?

If you aren't already on our mailing list and would like to be, please drop me an e-mail (address below).

Best wishes to all

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