

SACRED MOUNTAINS OF THE WORLD
An Exploration of their Spiritual, Cultural, and Environmental
Significance

Course Syllabus
Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) UC Berkeley
University Hall 41b, Winter 2019
Wednesdays, 10 am to 12 pm
January 23 – February 27

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As the highest and most dramatic features of the landscape, mountains have an extraordinary power to uplift the spirit and evoke a sense of the sacred. The ethereal rise of a ridge in mist, the glint of moonlight on an icy face, a flare of gold on a distant peak -- such glimpses of transcendent beauty can reveal our world as a place of unimaginable mystery and splendor. In the overwhelming sense of wonder and awe that mountains awaken, people throughout the world, from traditional pilgrims to modern-day mountaineers, experience a deeper reality that imbues their lives with meaning and vitality.

This course uses an evocative blend of striking images, adventure, and stories to explore the diverse ways in which mountains symbolize and embody humanity's highest values and aspirations. Drawing on research for his award-winning book *Sacred Mountains of the World* and his own experiences ranging from the Andes to the Himalayas, Edwin Bernbaum takes us on a fascinating journey revealing the rich variety of roles that mountains have played in the mythology, religion, history, literature, and art of people and cultures around the world. The course delves into the

spiritual dimensions of mountaineering and draws out the implications of sacred mountains for environmental and cultural preservation based on Ed's work with National Parks and World Heritage Sites. The conclusion focuses on the ways in which the contemplation of sacred mountains can promote personal growth and transform our lives, even in cities far from the sight of the peaks themselves.

The course covers the following topics in a combination of lectures, discussions, and exercises (the descriptions of the first four weeks include a representative sample of some of the sacred mountains we will be viewing and discussing):

Week 1, January 23. The Power and Mystery of Mountains: Abode of the Sacred

The experience of mountains and conceptions of the sacred, both religious and secular; Kailas, Nanda Devi, Kangchenjunga, Annapurna, and Everest in the Himalayas.

Week 2, January 30. East Asia and the Middle East: Heights of Transformation and Revelation

Tai Shan, Hua Shan, Fuji, Koya, and Omine in East Asia; Sinai, Zion, and Tabor in the Middle East.

Week 3, February 6. Europe and Africa: Peaks of Perfection, Places of Origin

Olympus, Parnassus, Athos, Glastonbury Tor, Mont Blanc, and the Alps in Europe; Kilimanjaro and Kenya in Africa.

Week 4, February 13. Oceania and the Americas: Islands of the Sky, the High and the Beautiful, Mountains of Vanished Empires

Uluru, Tongariro, and Kilauea in Australia and Oceania; Denali, Shasta, the San Francisco Peaks, and the Sierra Nevada in North America; Machu Picchu and high altitude sites in South America.

Week 5, February 20. The Symbolism and Nature of Mountains

Widespread themes and metaphoric juxtaposition in the symbolism of sacred mountains, the role of culture in environmental conservation, spiritual dimensions of mountaineering.

Week 6, February 27. Sacred Mountains and Everyday Life

Sacred mountains in literature and art, transformations of the human spirit, spiritual implications for daily life, personal observations and conclusions.

There are no required readings, but excerpts from *Sacred Mountains of the World* (University of California Press) and a bibliography will be made available online for reference and further exploration.