

SACRED MOUNTAINS OF THE WORLD HEIGHTS OF INSPIRATION

Course Syllabus

Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) UC Berkeley

Thursdays, 10 am - noon

June 9 – June 30, 2022

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As the highest and most dramatic features of the landscape, mountains are associated with the highest and most central values and aspirations of cultures throughout the world. The remote peak of Mount Kailas, rising aloof above the Tibetan Plateau, directs the minds of millions of Hindus and Buddhists toward the utmost attainments of spiritual liberation. Mount Sinai occupies a special place in the Bible as the imposing site where Moses received the Ten Commandments, the basis of law and ethics in Western civilization. The Hopi and Navajo view the San Francisco Peaks of Arizona as a sacred source of water and healing on which their communities and lives depend. As the writings of John Muir demonstrate, views of mountains as places of inspiration and renewal helped give rise to the environmental movement and have played a key role in galvanizing support for national parks such as Yosemite and Mount Rainier.

From the Sierra Nevada to the Himalayas, people look up to the heights for inspiration, renewal, wisdom, meaning, identity, healing, life-giving water, and various other blessings. Drawing on personal experiences,

work with National Parks and UNESCO World Heritage sites, and extensive research for his award-winning book, *Sacred Mountains of the World*, Edwin Bernbaum explores the rich variety of roles that mountains have played in the mythology, religion, philosophy, history, literature, and art of cultures around the world, both traditional and modern. The discussion also delves into the spiritual dimensions of mountaineering. Illustrated with spectacular photographs and enlivened with dramatic stories, the course highlights the impacts of climate change on the sacredness of mountains and implications for environmental and cultural conservation. The conclusion focuses on the relevance of sacred mountains for everyday life.

Week 1: Abode of the Sacred

The experience of mountains and the sacred, both religious and secular, sacred mountains of the Himalayas.

Week 2: Heights of Transformation and Revelation, Peaks of Perfection

Sacred mountains of East Asia, the Middle East, and Europe.

Week 3: The High and the Beautiful, Mountains of Vanished Empires

Sacred mountains of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas.

Week 4: Sacred Mountains, the Environment, and Everyday Life

Impacts of climate change on sacred mountains, role of culture in conservation, implications for everyday life.

For those interested in learning more, readings from the second edition of *Sacred Mountains of the World* (Cambridge University Press 2022) will be suggested. A selected bibliography of other references will be provided.