

SACRED MOUNTAINS OF THE WORLD: THE HEIGHTS OF INSPIRATION

Course Syllabus
Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) UC Berkeley
Tuesdays, 1 - 3 pm
September 15 - October 13, except for Oct. 6
Golden Bear Center, Suite 365, and Livestreamed

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Mountains have an extraordinary power to evoke a sense of the sacred. As the highest and most dramatic features of the landscape, they have become naturally associated with the highest and most central values and aspirations of cultures around 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 revere the San Francisco Peaks of Arizona as a sacred source of rain and healing on which their lives depend. 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.

Drawing on personal experiences, work with national parks and UNESCO World Heritage sites, and research for his book, *Sacred Mountains of the World*, Edwin Bernbaum explores the rich variety of roles that mountains as sacred places have played in the mythology, religion, philosophy, history, literature, and art of cultures around the

world, both religious and secular. Illustrated with spectacular photographs and enlivened with dramatic stories and anecdotes, the course also delves into the spiritual dimensions of mountaineering and implications for climate change and environmental 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, including Everest, Kailas, Nanda Devi, Annapurna, Kangchenjunga.

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

Sacred mountains of East Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, including Taishan, Fuji, Sinai, Zion, Olympos, Athos, Mont Blanc.

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

Sacred mountains and mountain sites of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas, including Kenya, Kilauea, Machu Picchu, Chimborazo, San Francisco Peaks, Shasta.

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

Implications of sacred mountains for climate change and conservation, spiritual dimensions of mountaineering, mountains and the sacred in literature and art, relevance for everyday life.

There are no required readings. For those who want to explore further, the primary reference for the course is the second edition of *Sacred Mountains of the World* by Edwin Bernbaum (Cambridge University Press, 2022). A bibliography is provided with additional references.