



Virtual Multi-Faith Retreat Series on Inter-Spirituality and Comparative Mysticism

Biographies

Speaker Bios

Jorge N. Ferrer, Ph.D.: Jorge N. Ferrer, Ph.D., was core faculty for more than 20 years at the California Institute of Integral Studies, San Francisco, where he also served as chair of the Department of East-West Psychology. He is the author of *Revisioning Transpersonal Theory: A Participatory Vision of Human Spirituality* (State University of New York Press, 2002), *Participation and the Mystery: Transpersonal Essays in Psychology, Education, and Religion* (State University of New York Press, 2017), as well as the co-editor (with Jacob H. Sherman) of *The Participatory Turn: Spirituality, Mysticism, Religious Studies* (State University of New York Press, 2008), which was the focus of a panel at the 2010 American Academy of Religion (AAR) Annual Meeting and spurred another panel on “Contemplative Studies from a Participatory Perspective” at the 2011 AAR Annual Meeting. His participatory pedagogy to the teaching of mysticism has been featured in the anthology, *Teaching Mysticism* (Oxford University Press/American Academy of Religion Series, edited by William Parsons), and his approach to religious diversity and pluralism has been widely discussed in both the academia and contemporary spiritual culture. In 2009, he was selected as an advisor to the organization Religions for Peace at the United Nations on a research project aimed at solving global interreligious conflict. He was born in Barcelona, Spain.

Greg Kennedy, SJ, Ph.D.: Greg Kennedy entered the Jesuits in 2006 and since then has worked in ecology and spirituality in Canada, USA, Jamaica, and Colombia. A Catholic priest since 2015, Greg currently dedicates himself to spiritual direction, writing and farming at the Ignatius Jesuit Centre in Guelph, Ontario. He holds a doctorate in philosophy, plus masters degrees in philosophy, theology, and divinity. His most recent books are *Reupholstered Psalms* and *Amazing Friendships between Animals and Saints* (both published by Novalis). His Catholic faith has been enriched by his practice of hatha yoga and Buddhist mediation. Song writing and poetry are also important creative practices for him.

Norman Feldman: Norman Feldman first encountered Buddhism and Buddhist meditation while travelling in India in 1971. Since then he has studied with well known teachers in Theravada, Tibetan and Zen traditions, with his main focus on the Southeast Asian Theravada tradition of Vipassana, Insight Meditation. Since 1986 he has been leading Insight Meditation retreats in North America, Europe and Asia. Norman is a co-founder and retired Guiding Teacher of True North Insight Meditation Centre. His web site is www.insightmeditationretreats.ca.



Jason Idriss Sparkes, Ph.D.: Dr. Jason Idriss Sparkes teaches Religion and Global Studies at Wilfrid Laurier University. Moreover, he has undergone decades of training and practice in the contemplative techniques and devotional chanting tradition of the Burhāniya Sufi Order/Tarīqah. This transnational order is based in Sudan and deeply rooted in North African spiritual lineages developed over fourteen centuries. The chanting repertoire from which Dr. Sparkes draws includes musical styles from Sudan, Egypt, Morocco, and Andalusia (Islamic Spain), as well as poetry written in Arabic by saints from across the traditional Islamic world. He is regularly invited to participate in Sufi gatherings in North America and North Africa. At Wilfrid Laurier University and Martin Luther University, he has organized and led several Sufi concerts, public ceremonies, and contemplative music pauses. He has also led several in-class workshops with students from the Christian Studies and Global Citizenship program at Martin Luther University, and from the Faculty of Music at Wilfrid Laurier University. A sample of his chanting can be found online (https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLC-Hd5dnAtd0ed7irQbbJNnV6r_PycZ Ae).

Ashwani Kumar, Ph.D.: Dr. Ashwani Kumar is an Associate Professor of Education at Mount Saint Vincent University. His teaching and research focus upon meditative inquiry, which is a self-reflective and aesthetic approach to teaching, learning, and living. He has conceptualized several key curricular and pedagogical concepts, namely, *curriculum as meditative inquiry*, *teaching as meditative inquiry*, and *music as meditative inquiry*. He has also developed a contemplative research methodology called *dialogical meditative inquiry* to conduct subjective and inter-subjective qualitative research. He has been seriously engaged with J. Krishnamurti's work for more than 15 years. He has spoken at Krishnamurti schools and study centers in the US, Canada, the UK, and India. He is the author of *Curriculum As Meditative Inquiry* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

Les Lancaster, Ph.D.: B Les Lancaster is a Founding Director and Dean of the Alef Trust, through which he runs online postgraduate master's and doctoral programs in consciousness, spirituality and transpersonal psychology. He is Professor Emeritus of Transpersonal Psychology at Liverpool John Moores University, UK, an Honorary Research Fellow in Religions and Theology, University of Manchester, UK, and Associated Distinguished Professor of Integral and Transpersonal Psychology at the California Institute of Integral Studies, US. He has previously served as Chair of the Transpersonal Psychology Section of the British Psychological Society, as President of the International Transpersonal Association, and as a Board member of the Association for Transpersonal Psychology. Les' research interests focus on the cognitive neuroscience of consciousness and the connections between this topic and mysticism, specifically focusing on *Kabbalistic Psychology*. His published works include journal articles, chapters in edited books and his own books, of which *The essence of kabbalah* and *Approaches to consciousness: The marriage of science and mysticism* represent his major interests. In addition to his academic work, he has studied and taught Jewish mysticism and kabbalistic practices over several decades.



Debbie Lou Ludolph, Ph.D.: Debbie Lou Ludolph, PhD, is Dean of Chapel and Director of the Kanata Centre for Worship and Global Song at Martin Luther University College, Waterloo. With a background in vocal pedagogy and practical theology, Debbie Lou develops gatherings at the intersection of spirituality, justice, and the arts, and teaches courses that explore the spiritual practice of singing together within congregational and community settings. In her work, Debbie Lou combines a passion for singing, the spiritual practice of contemplation, and public theology. For fifteen years, the singing community of *Inshallah* (see www.inshallah.ca) under the guidance and direction of Debbie Lou has been singing songs from around the world to nurture openness to the sacred, to encounters with difference, and to knowing oneself. After many years of practice, Debbie Lou recently completed her doctoral work asking the question: How does singing together shape worldview?

Alexander Blair Stonechild, Ph.D.: is Professor of Indigenous Studies at the First Nations University of Canada in Regina, Saskatchewan. He is a member of the Muscowpetung First Nation, attended Qu'Appelle Indian Residential School and Campion Collegiate, obtained his Bachelor's degree from McGill, and Master's and Doctorate degrees from University of Regina. In 1976 Blair became the first faculty member at First Nations University, and has been Dean of Academics and Executive Director of Development. Major publications include *Loyal Till Death: Indians and the North-West Rebellion (1997)*; *The New Buffalo: Aboriginal Post-secondary Policy in Canada (2006)*; *Buffy Sainte-Marie: It's My Way (2012)*; *The Knowledge Seeker: Embracing Indigenous Spirituality (2016)* and *Loss of Indigenous Eden and the Fall of Spirituality (2020)*.

Khodadad (Khodi) Kaviani, Ph.D.: is professor of education at Central Washington University. His research and teaching include the Middle Eastern politics and culture, teacher education, social studies methods, democratic education, and the intersection of education and ideology. He is the author of *Rethinking Khayyaamism: his controversial poems and vision* and three illustrated books for young adults about selected Iranian traditions that have become part of the Zoroastrian folklore. They are (1) *Norooz with My Family*; (2) *Mehregaan: The Triumph of Liberty Over Tyranny*; and (3) *Iranian Calendar Stories: Myths, Legends, and History*. Dr. Kaviani has produced sixteen cultural songs highlighting the living Zoroastrian traditions. These cultural songs are accessible at <http://digitalcommons.cwu.edu/kaviani/>

Mervat Abdel Nasser MD, MPhil, FRCPsych: is a graduate of Cairo Medical School and fellow of the Royal college of Psychiatrists; London. She has master's in philosophy and a doctorate in psychiatry from London University. She served as a clinical psychiatrist and university academic in England from 1977-2007 and all her publications in this field are on the **interface between Mind and Culture**. She has as well a long-standing interest in Egyptology and has written on the subject in the Arabic language. She took an early retirement in from her job as a consultant psychiatrist and senior lecturer, Kings College London in 2007 and returned to Egypt to pursue her dream of establishing the project of New Hermopolis. She has since dedicated herself entirely to this cause (www.newhermopolis.org). Her latest book *'The Path to the New Hermopolis- The History, Philosophy and future of the City of Hermes'* has just been published by Rubedo Press 2019.