



Asia House presents The Bagri Foundation Lecture Series

# Asian Mysticism

Brunei Gallery Lecture Theatre • 2nd October – 30th October 2007 • Admission Free

# ASIAN MYSTICISM



Asia House is the 'must visit' centre for everyone with an interest in the rich and varied cultures and economic vibrancy of Asia. As a leading pan-

Asian organisation, Asia House offers a range of unique opportunities to gain a greater appreciation and understanding of business, diplomatic and cultural interaction between Asia and Britain. We run a lively programme of approximately 130 events annually covering Asia in the widest possible geographic context – from Iran to Japan and from the Central Asian Republics to Indonesia.

## Asia House

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**BAGRI**  
FOUNDATION

The Bagri Foundation was set up in 1985 and one of its key objectives is to encourage learning through scholarships, bursaries, lecture series and exhibitions. The Foundation seeks to promote a better understanding of art and culture particularly of South Asia. In recent years it has helped fund major lecture series on aspects of Indian history, Indian religious architecture, miniature paintings, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism.



## ADMISSION FREE

### Brunei Gallery Lecture Theatre

School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS)

Thornhaugh Street

Russell Square

London WC1H 0XG

Nearest tube: Russell Square

## Asia House presents five lectures sponsored by the Bagri Foundation

In every religious tradition of the world, a special place is held for those whom the faiths call mystics. These individuals arise from within specific traditions, but also go far beyond the confines of any one tradition. They seem to soar above the mundane world of both religion and everyday life and to enter new realms of experience and insight. This series explores the mystical traditions and mystics of some of the major Asian religions and introduces us to a spiritual level which ultimately links faiths rather than emphasises their differences.

### TUESDAY 2 OCTOBER 7-8pm

#### Exploring Asian Mysticism

This lecture will first look at the remarkable rise of interest in mystical experience and practice, and in the study of mysticism during the twentieth century, then examine different forms of Asian mysticism found in the spiritualities of India, China and Japan. What is distinctive in each and common to all? How far does the global world of the twenty-first century call for a convergence between the mysticisms of Asia and the West? Can the spiritual resources of mysticism help us to create a mystical ethic of compassion, love and wisdom to heal the wounds of people and the planet?

*Professor Ursula King, Professor Emerita of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Bristol; Professorial Research Associate, SOAS, University of London.*

### WEDNESDAY 10 OCTOBER 7-8pm

#### Mysticism in the Indic Religious Tradition

Mysticism constitutes a particularly visible part of the religious landscape of India. This lecture will examine reports of mystical experience from Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. If mysticism is defined as the belief that direct knowledge of God, or the ultimate reality, is possible then the Indic religious tradition identifies several ways of achieving it. Two of these – the path of knowledge or *jñāna* and the path of devotion or *bhakti* – will provide the main focus of the presentation.

*Professor Arvind Sharma, Birks Professor of Comparative Religion, McGill University, Montreal, Canada.*

### TUESDAY 16 OCTOBER 7-8pm

#### Navigating the Ocean of the Soul: Sufism

Muslims have addressed issues that we moderns recognize as "mysticism" mainly in the strands of the tradition that are commonly lumped together as "Sufism." The major concern of Sufi teachers has been to offer both theoretical and practical instruction on how to follow the example of the prophet Muhammad in achieving nearness to God. In both the theory and practice, the *nafs* – the soul or self – is the central issue, because it

is our own selves that are the locus of awareness and transformation. This lecture will review basic Sufi teachings on the *nafs*, which is, as the thirteenth century mystic Ibn Arabi puts it, "an ocean without shore".

*Professor William C. Chittick, Professor, Department of Asian and Asian-American Studies, Stony Brook University, New York.*

### TUESDAY 23 OCTOBER 7-8pm

#### The Role of the Inspired Fool in Daoist Mysticism

Chuang Tzu (in pinyin Zhuang Zi) lived in the fourth century BC and the book which carries his name contains stories, sayings and legends about him which provide one of the funniest, most profound and enjoyable books of religious mysticism in the world. Although he is called a Daoist, there was no such thing as Daoism when he was alive. But his writings, together with those of Lao Tzu (Lao Zi) are amongst the most formative forces which flowed into the creation of Daoism itself. But Chuang Tzu, like all mystics is much, much larger than the tradition that claims him. Through anecdote, story and legend, Martin will take us into the mystical, humorous, thought provoking world of one of the world's very few funny mystics.

*Martin Palmer, Secretary General, Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), Bath and translator of the Penguin Classic 'Chuang Tzu'.*

### TUESDAY 30 OCTOBER 7-8pm

#### Tibetan Mysticism

India was the source of Tibetan Buddhism, but the directions in which Tibet's mystic traditions developed were often perceived as shocking and alien by Buddhists from other countries. Tibetans themselves see no contradiction between their beliefs and practices and the most sublime aspirations of the Buddhist enterprise: necromantic and sexual rites, techniques for the generation of psychic heat, transfer of consciousness and other such performances, which are pursued in the quest for liberation.

*Dr Charles Ramble, Lecturer in Tibetan and Himalayan Studies, Oriental Institute of Oxford University.*