

## Spiritual Struggles in Film, Part 3: The Divine and Ultimate Meaning Struggles in Ingmar Bergman's "The Seventh Seal"

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## Presenters

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Professor Emeritus of Psychology, Bowling Green State University
- Julie J. Exline, PhD  
Professor of Psychology, Case Western Reserve University

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## Faculty Disclosure

Francis Lu has listed no financial interest/arrangement that would be considered a conflict of interest.

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## Past relevant Duke seminars

- July 26, 2022 presentation on Spiritual Struggles by Ken Pargament
- Oct. 31, 2023 presentation of Spiritual Struggles in Film, Part 1
- Nov. 28, 2023 presentation of Spiritual Struggles in Film, Part 2
- <https://spiritualityandhealth.duke.edu/index.php/education/seminars/>

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## Future relevant seminar

- "Exploring the Night Sea Journey Through the Mindful Viewing of Films"
  - Online seminar March 9, 1 to 6pm ET
  - C.G. Jung Institute of San Francisco
  - Presenter: Francis Lu, MD
  - On the films "Titanic" and "Ikiru"

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## Agenda


- Spiritual Struggles: Divine and Ultimate Meaning Struggles
- Mindful viewing of films
- Ingmar Bergman, the director
- "The Seventh Seal"
- Preview of 5 film clips in context
- 5 film clips back-to-back (25 minutes)
- Post-viewing processing of all the film clips
- Ken Pargament comments on Divine Struggles
- Julie Exline comments on Ultimate Meaning Struggles

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## A Definition of Spiritual Struggles


(Pargament & Exline, 2021, 2022)

- Spiritual struggles refer to experiences of **tension, strain,** and **conflict** about sacred matters.
- They can focus on the supernatural, the self, or other people.



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## Divine Struggles




- Negative thoughts or feelings focused on God
- Relevant for some who don't believe in God
- Sample items:
  - Felt angry at God
  - Felt as though God had abandoned me

(from RSS: Exline, Pargament, Grubbs, & Yali, 2014)

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## Ultimate Meaning Struggles



- Questioning whether life has an ultimate purpose
- Sample items:
  - had concerns about whether there is any ultimate purpose to life or existence
  - questioned whether life really matters

(from RSS: Exline, Pargament, Grubbs, & Yali, 2014)

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## Ultimate Meaning Struggle Items


(Exline et al., 2014)

Questioned whether life really matters
Felt as though my life had no deeper meaning
Questioned whether my life will really make any difference in the world
Had concerns about whether there is any ultimate purpose to life or existence

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## Ultimate Meaning Struggles: Can They Lead to Growth?

- Point to the emptiness of certain values (e.g., financial gain; social climbing; power)
- Lead to a deeper purpose in life



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## The Dalai Lama

- “Awareness of death is the very bedrock of the path. Until you have developed this awareness, all other practices are obstructed.”

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## Agenda

- Mindful viewing of films
  - I invite you to experience all the film clips from a contemplative space starting with your way of silent centering.
  - Be present with full attention to what you see, hear, and feel while looking for what moments of the film that move you deeply.
  - Let go of premature analyzing, mind chatter, and distracting multi-tasking.

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## Agenda

- Post-film viewing process
  - 1': Observe silence and reflect on your experience of the film clips.
    - What scenes or images moved you deeply? What did you see? What did you hear? What did they show you?
  - 3': Journal your viewing experience.

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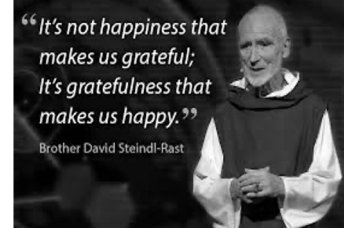
## Agenda

- Post-film viewing process
  - Try to type in the Chat one moving moment so we all can read what others have experienced.
  - Group discussion about the moving moments-- What did we learn from our experience of the film clips?
  - Questions/comments by Chat or live on screen Please be concise.

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## Brother David Steindl-Rast

Born in 1926 in Austria  
Benedictine monk  
1984: *Gratefulness, the Heart of Prayer*



[www.gratefulness.org](http://www.gratefulness.org)  
(then search "films" to learn about our 28 film seminars at Esalen Institute, 1990-2016)

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## Ingmar Bergman

- 1918-2007
- Directed over 60 films from 1944 to 2003
- Important influences: Shakespeare, Moliere, Ibsen, and Strindberg
- From Sweden
- Considered one of the greatest of all film directors

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## "The Seventh Seal"

- Bergman wrote and directed this 1957 film set in Sweden during the Black Death. Based on his play "Wood Painting." He considers it among his top 10 films.
- The story of a medieval knight Antonius Block and his squire Jons returning back from the Crusades to his castle and wife.

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## “The Seventh Seal”

- Title: A passage from the Bible's Book of Revelation, used as the start and end of the film, beginning with these words: “And when the Lamb had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.” Motif of the “silence of God.” The Apocalypse is foretold.

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## “The Seventh Seal”: Key Characters

- Knight (idealistic) vs. Squire Jons (bawdy, down-to-earth)
- Death
- Caravan of actors: Jof, his wife Mia, his infant son Mikael; actor-manager Jonas Skat
- Servant girl saved by the Squire
- Blacksmith Plog and wife Lisa

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## “The Seventh Seal”: Key Scenes

- Knight and Squire on the beach, and Death plays chess with the knight, the 1<sup>st</sup> of 3 such scenes.
- Knight and Squire visit a church.
  - Jons encounters a painter who depicts the Black Death.
  - Knight confesses
- Procession of flagellants led by a preacher.

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## “The Seventh Seal”: Key Scenes

- A happy scene: Jof, Mia, Mikael, Knight, Squire celebrating summer through eating wild strawberries and milk. Knight offers them safe passage.
- Knight, Squire, servant girl, Plog, Lisa return to the Knight's castle.
  - Knight meets his wife.
  - A last supper. Book of Revelations.
  - They face Death.
- Jof, Mia, the infant Mikael see them dance with Death on the horizon.

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## “The Seventh Seal”

- “Each film, you see, has its moment of contact, of human communication: ...A tiny moment in each film but the crucial one. What matters most of all in life is being able to make that contact with another human. Otherwise, you are dead, like so many people today are dead. But if you can take that first step toward communication, toward understanding, toward love, then no matter how difficult the future may be—and have no illusions, even with all the love in the world, living can be hellishly difficult—then you are saved. This is all that really matters, isn't it?” —Ingmar Bergman, *Playboy*, June 1964

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