The Institute for the Science of Religion at the University of Bern invites applications for two doctoral positions starting February 1, 2019, to work on the research project “Experiments with Experience: Experimenting with Religions and Spiritual Practice as Experimentation” funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF).

About the Project
For almost 200 years, religious actors described their spiritual practice as “experimenting with experiences.” Some depicted how they adopted for a limited period of time practices of different religious traditions and evaluated their effects “experimentally” (the “spiritual seekers”), while others documented in-depth experiences with a particular self-cultivation technique (or “technology of self,” Foucault). Such approaches were explicitly understood as “experimentation” in Spiritualism, (Neo-)Hinduism, Yoga, and (Neo-)Buddhism, or, more recently, in the broader field of alternative spiritualities. The project will study autobiographical accounts and other sources that describe religious practice as “experimentation,” and will ask whether or not such practices and their depiction entertain substantial – or merely metaphorical – analogies to experimental scientific practices (e.g., as continuous experimentations according to the modern understanding of the scientific ethos, namely, a rigorous process of pursuing new methods of discovery).

The project will approach the above-mentioned topics in two closely cooperating subprojects. The first, entitled “Religious Practice as Experimentation: Autobiographical Sources in India and the West,” will collect and contextualize autobiographical reports of “experimenting” with religion/s. The second subproject, “Experimental Systems, Spiritual Practices, and Religious Experience,” will take a theoretical and systematic interest in the practices of spiritual experimentation as described by their protagonists.

Two four-year doctoral positions (100%)

Your contribution:
• conduct research in one subproject – in close cooperation with the research team
• write a PhD in Science of Religion within the four years
• participate in activities of the Institute for the Science of Religion and the Center for Global Studies at the University of Bern
• collaborate with external research partners; help with the organization of conferences and workshops

Your profile:
• MA or MSc in Religious Studies, Comparative Religion, Indology, or neighboring disciplines
• Interest in approaches of literary studies, the study of autobiography, or philosophy of science

We offer:
• 100% appointment for 4 years (salary according to SNF specifications)
• Inspiring research environment (cooperation partners, among others, at the Universities of Fribourg, Edinburgh, and Lausanne)
• close cooperation with the Institute’s team and other scholars at the University of Bern

Contact
Please submit no later than November 15, 2018, the following application materials digitally to jens.schlieter@relwi.unibe.ch: a one-page cover letter explaining your specific interest in one subproject and the project as such; an up-to-date c.v.; academic certificates. For more information, please contact Prof. Jens Schlieter.