

BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY

PH 215: Buddhist Philosophy
Skidmore College

Fall, 2009
Dr. Joel R. Smith

An introduction to selected themes, schools, and thinkers of the Buddhist philosophical tradition in India, Tibet, China, and Japan. Buddhist metaphysics and ethics are examined with reference to the nature of reality and the person, causality and action, wisdom and compassion, emptiness and nihilism. Comparisons are made to Western philosophers, especially regarding the Buddhist critique of substance and the Buddhist ideal of compassionate openness to the world.

Required Texts

1. -----, The Dhammapada, tr. Balangoda Ananda Maitreya (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1995).
2. The Dalai Lama, Practicing Wisdom: The Perfection of Shantideva's Bodhisattva Way, tr. Geshe Thupten Jinpa (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2005).
3. Dogen, The Heart of Dogen's Shobogenzo, tr. Norman Wadell and Masao Abe (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2002).
4. Gyamtso, Khenpo Tsultrim, Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness, tr. Shenpen Hookham (Auckland, New Zealand: Zhyl-sil Cho-kyi Gha-tsal Publications, 2001).
5. Kasulis, Thomas P., Zen Action/Zen Person (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1981).
6. Mitchell, Donald W., Buddhism: Introducing the Buddhist Experience (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).
7. Tsering, Geshe Tashi, Emptiness (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2009).
8. Santideva, A Guide to the Bodhsattva Way of Live, tr. Vesna Wallace and B. Alan Wallace (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1997).

Schedule of Assignments

Theravada Buddhism in India, Sri Lanka, & Southeast Asia: No-Self (*anatman*) and Nirvana

- 10: Mitchell, The Life of Gautama Buddha (Ch. 1);
Mitchell, The Teachings of Buddha (Ch. 2).
- 15: Mitchell, The Way of the Elders (Ch. 3);
The Dhammapada (all).
- 17: “There Is No Ego or Personal Identity; Rebirth is Not Transmigration”
(handout);
Gyamtsso, Stage One: Shravaka (pp. 9-25);
Mitchell, Abhidharma Schools (pp. 134-138);
Tsering, Partless Particles and Partless Moments of Consciousness (pp.
48-51).

Mahayana Buddhism in India: The Bodhisattva’s Wisdom (*prajna*) & Compassion (*karuna*)

- 22: Mitchell, The Great Vehicle (Ch. 4). DF1
- 24: A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life (Preface & Introduction and
Ch. I, II, III). DF2
- 29: A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life (Ch. IV, V, VI). DF3
- 1: A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life (Ch. VII, VIII, X – not Ch. IX).
DF4
- 6: Practicing Wisdom (pp. vii-xiii in Editor’s Preface and Ch. 1-5); DF5
A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life (read Ch. IX along with
the relevant chapters in Practicing Wisdom).
- 8: Practicing Wisdom (Ch. 6-8) (along with Ch. IX of A Guide). DF6
- 13: Practicing Wisdom (Ch. 9-12) (along with Ch. IX of A Guide). DF7
- 15: Mitchell, The Indian Experience of Buddhism (Ch. 5). DF8
- 20: No class; work on Essay #1.
- 21 (Wednesday): Essay #1 due by 6:00 p.m. sharp in Ladd 217.
- 22: Rabten, The Heart of Wisdom (Text & Commentary) (handout); DF9
Kasulis, “Nirvana” (handout). DF10

**Vajrayana Buddhism in Tibet:
The Buddhist Tenet Schools & Emptiness (*sunyata*)**

- 27: Mitchell, The Tibetan Experience of Buddhism (Ch. 6). DF11
Gyatso, Comings & Goings (pp. ix-xi) & Introduction (pp. 1-8); DF12
Tsering, The Revolution of Selflessness (Ch. 1); DF13
Tsering, Prerequisites for Understanding Selflessness (Ch. 2).
29: Tsering, Concepts of Selfhood (pp. 35-55); DF14
Mitchell, Yogacara (149-153);
Gyatso, Stage Two: Cittamatra (p. 27-43). DF1

3: Gyatso. Stage Three: Svatantrika (pp. 45-53);
Tsering, Selflessness in Svatantrika Madhyamaka (pp. 55-59); DF2
Tsering, Differences between Svatantrika and Prasangika (Ch. 4).
5: Gyatso, Stage Four: Prasangika (pp. 55-63);
Tsering, Prasangika's Unique Presentation of Emptiness (Ch. 5). DF3

10: Tsering, Emptiness and Dependent Arising (Ch. 7); DF4
Gyatso, Stage Five: Shentong (pp. 65-79) & Conclusion (p. 81). DF5

Zen Buddhism in Japan: Dogen and Meditation (*zazen*)

- 12: Mitchell, The Chinese Experience of Buddhism (Ch. 7);
Mitchell, The Japanese Experience of Buddhism (Ch. 9). DF6

17: Kasulis, Preface & Cultural Setting (pp. ix-15); DF7
Kasulis, Nagarjuna: The Logic of Emptiness (Ch. 2). DF8
19: Kasulis, Chinese Taoism (Ch. 3); DF9
Kasulis, No-Mind (Ch, 4);
Kasulis, Zen & Reality (Ch. 5); DF10
Kasulis, Zen Action/Zen Person (Ch. 9).

24: Essay #2 on due at beginning of class; discuss topic in class.
26: Thanksgiving break.

- 1: Dogen, Fukanzazengi (Universal Promotion of the Principle of Zazen)
(pp, 1-6);
Kasulis, Dogen's Phenomenology of Zazen (Ch. 6); DF11
Dogen, Bendowa (Negotiating the Way) (pp, 7-30);
Dogen, Genjokoan (Manifesting Suchness) (pp. 39045).
3: Abe, "Non-Being and *Mu*—the Metaphysical Nature of Negativity in
the East and the West" (handout); DF12
Smith, "Masao Abe on Negativity in the East and the West" (handout);

8: Kasulis, Dogen: Person as Presence (Ch. 7); DF13
Dogen, Uji (Being-time) (pp. 47-58); DF14
optional: Kasulis, Hakuin (Ch. 8).

Modern Buddhism in Asia and the West

- 10: Mitchell, Modern Buddhism in Asia (Ch. 10);
Mitchell, Buddhism in the West (Ch. 11).

14: (Monday): Essay #3 due in Ladd 217 by 12:00 noon sharp.

Course Requirements

(1) Participation (20%): Participation in class discussion is essential to your learning in this course, and I encourage you to participate actively in our discussions. The combination of the following components will count 20% of your final course grade:

(a) Attendance is required at every class unless there is a certified medical reason or personal emergency. My guidelines for how attendance and participation will affect your grade are as follows:

A or A- = attend every class and make useful contributions to discussion in every class.

B+ or B = attend every class and make regular contributions.

B- = attend every class and contribute occasionally.

C or D or F = one or more absences no matter how much you talk.

Please don't come to class late. Please don't leave during class unless it is absolutely necessary. Please be sure that your cell phone is turned off. Please don't eat during class (coffee/tea, water, or sodas are ok).

The Skidmore guideline is that you should prepare two hours outside of class for each hour in class. Each class is 1 hour and 20 minutes long, so I expect you to spend at least 2 ½ hours preparing for each class. I expect you to do all of the assigned reading.

Your understanding of class discussions, and the quality of class discussion itself, depend on how well you have prepared the assignments, so do the assignments carefully—read actively and critically by underlining, highlighting, taking notes, outlining, and rereading. This is an advanced seminar so you should take special responsibility for being well prepared and participating actively.

(b) Discussion Focus. Twice during the semester I will ask you and another person in the course to focus our class discussion. Do this by discussing the reading with your partner outside of class and deciding what passage you want to focus our discussion on. Identify this passage in class and raise an issue about it for the class—question it or criticize it or defend it or elaborate on it or apply it. (These class periods are marked DF#.)

(c) Study Guides. Brief written assignments on the reading will be assigned occasionally, usually about once per week. They will be graded pass/fail. They will be due at the beginning of class, and late study guides will not be accepted for credit.

The combination of attendance, participation in discussion, discussion focus, and study guides--(a) through (c) above--will count 20% of your final course grade.

(2) Essay #1 (20%): An essay due on October 21 will count 20% of your final course grade. It should be about 6 pages long. I will provide detailed written instructions later.

(3) Essays #2 and #3 (60%): Essay #2 (30%) is due at the beginning of class on November 24 just before Thanksgiving break. We will discuss the topic in class. It should be 6-8 typed pages, and will count 30% of your final course grade. Essay #3 (30%) is due in my office, Ladd 217, on December 14 (the first day of exam week) by 12:00 noon sharp. It should be about 8-10 typed pages, and will count 30% of your final course grade. I will provide detailed written instructions later for both essays.

I will be delighted to talk with you outside of class. Make an appointment or drop by during my office hours:

Office hours: Monday & Wednesday: 2:00- 3:00
Tuesday & Thursday: 4:00- 5:00
Friday: 11:00-12:00

Office: Ladd 217

Email: jsmith@skidmore.edu

Office phone: 580-5407 (please don't call me at home)