

BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY

PH 215
Fall, 2012

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Skidmore College

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.

Learning Goals:

- (1) Study Buddhist philosophy in the Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana traditions, including its historical development and diversity.
- (2) Focus on Tibetan Buddhism and Zen Buddhism as case studies.
- (3) Occasionally consider Buddhist philosophy in relation to Western philosophy and to other philosophies in India.
- (4) Place Buddhist philosophy in the broader context of Buddhist religion (myths, rituals, symbols, meditations, art, politics).
- (5) Learn about the cultures of India, Tibet, Southeast Asia, China, and Japan through the study of Buddhism in those cultures.
- (6) Develop subtle reading, writing, and analytical skills, including critical evaluation, by discussing readings and writing essays about them.
- (7) Visit nearby Tibetan and Zen sites to observe contemporary Buddhism in the U.S. (These visits are optional.)
- (8) Explore your own views about Buddhism to develop your own philosophy of life.

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

Monday & Wednesday: 2:30- 3:30
Tuesday & Thursday: 11:30-12:30
Friday: 1:45- 3:00

Office: Ladd 217

Email: jsmith@skidmore.edu

Office phone: (518) 580-5407 (Please don't call me at home.)

Required Texts

1. -----, The Dhammapada, tr. Balangoda Ananda Maitreya (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1995).
2. Dogen, The Heart of Dogen's Shobogenzo, tr. Norman Wadell and Masao Abe (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2002).
3. Gyamtso, Khenpo Tsultrim, Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness, tr. Shenpen Hookham (Auckland, New Zealand: Zhyl-sil Cho-kyi Gha-tsal Publications, 2001).
4. Kasulis, Thomas P., Zen Action/Zen Person (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1981).
5. Mitchell, Donald W., Buddhism: Introducing the Buddhist Experience, Second Edition (New York: Oxford University press, 2007).
6. Santideva, A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life, tr. Vesna Wallace & B. Alan Wallace (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1997).
7. Tsering, Geshe Tashi, Emptiness (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2009).
8. Yeshe, Lama Thubten, Introduction to Tantra: The Transformation of Desire (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001).

Schedule of Assignments

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

- 5: Mitchell, The Life of Gautama Buddha (Ch. 1);
Mitchell, The Teachings of Buddha (Ch. 2).
- 7: Mitchell, The Way of the Elders (Ch. 3);
The Dhammapada (all). DF1.1
- 12: "There Is No Ego or Personal Identity; Rebirth is Not Transmigration"
(handout); DF1.2
Tsering, The Seven-Point Analysis (93-102);
Tsering, Partless Particles & Moments of Consciousness (handout);
Gyamtso, Stage One: Shrivaka (9-25);
Mitchell, Abhidharma Schools (134-138). DF1.3

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

- 14: Mitchell, The Great Vehicle (Ch. 4). DF1.4
- 19: A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life (Preface & Introduction & Ch. I, II, III, IV, V). DF1.5
- 21: A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life (Ch. VI, VII, VIII, X & browse in Ch. IX). DF1.6
- 26: No class (Yom Kippur).
- 28: Tsering , Heart of Perfection of Wisdom Sutra (pp. 131-133)
Mitchell on the Heart Sutra (re-read pp. 108-110);
Rabten, The Heart of Wisdom (Text & Commentary) (handout); DF1.7
Kasulis, Nirvana (handout). DF1.8
- 3: Mitchell, The Indian Experience of Buddhism (Ch. 5). DF1.9

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

- 5: Mitchell, The Tibetan Experience of Buddhism (Ch. 6);
Gyatso, Comings & Goings (pp. ix-xi) & Introduction (1-8);
Tsering, The Revolution of Selflessness (Ch. 1);
Tsering, Prerequisites for Understanding Selflessness (Ch. 2).
- 5-7: Weekend retreat at Zen Mountain Monastery? (optional)
- 10: Tsering, Concepts of Selfhood (35-55); DF1.10
Mitchell, Yogacara (149-153); DF1.11
Gyatso, Stage Two: Cittamatra (27-43).
- 12: Gyatso. Stage Three: Svatantrika (45-53); DF1.12
Tsering, Selflessness in Svatantrika Madhyamaka (55-59);
Tsering, Differences between Svatantrika and Prasangika (Ch. 4).
- 17: Gyatso, Stage Four: Prasangika (55-63); DF1.13
Tsering, Prasangika's Unique Presentation of Emptiness (Ch. 5);
Mitchell, Prasangika (144-145).
- 19: Tsering, Emptiness and Dependent Arising (Ch. 7). DF1.14

- 24: Gyamtso, Stage Five: Shentong (65-79) & Conclusion (p. 81) DF1.15
 Mitchell, The Tathagatagarbha Literature (146-149); DF2.1
 Williams, The Tathagatagarbha (handout: read 104-115;
 recommended: 115-128)

26: Study day—no class.

27 (Saturday): Day trip to Karma Triyana Dharmachakra? (optional)

- 31: Thurman/Batchelor, Reincarnation: A Debate (handout); DF2.2
 Yeshe, Introduction to Tantra (Ch. 1-8). DF2.3
 2: Yeshe, Introduction to Tantra (Ch. 8-12 & Afterword). DF2.4

7: Essay on Tibetan Buddhism due; discuss topic in class.

Zen Buddhism in Japan: Dogen on Zazen & No-Mind (*mu-shin*)

- 9: Mitchell, The Chinese Experience of Buddhism (Ch. 7); DF2.5
 Mitchell, The Japanese Experience of Buddhism (Ch. 9). DF2.6
- 14: Kasulis, Preface & Cultural Setting (pp. ix-15); DF2.7
 Kasulis, Nagarjuna: The Logic of Emptiness (Ch. 2); DF2.8
 Mitchell, Nagarjuna (139-144).
- 16: Kasulis, Chinese Taoism (Ch. 3); DF2.9
 Kasulis, No-Mind (Ch. 4); DF2.10
 Kasulis, Zen & Reality (Ch. 5); DF2.11
 Kasulis, Zen Action/Zen Person (Ch. 9).

21 Thanksgiving

23 break

- 28: Dogen, Fukanzazengi (Universal Promotion of the Principle of Zazen)
 (1-6);
 Kasulis, Dogen's Phenomenology of Zazen (Ch. 6); DF2.12
 Dogen, Bendowa (Negotiating the Way) (pp. 7-30);
 Dogen, Genjokoan (Manifesting Suchness) (pp. 39-45). DF2.13
- 30: Mitchell, Zen Buddhism (296-301);
 Kasulis, Dogen: Person as Presence (Ch. 7); DF2.14
 Dogen, Uji (Being-time) (47-58).

- 5: Abe, “Non-Being and *Mu*—the Metaphysical Nature of Negativity in the East and the West” (handout); DF2.15
Smith, “Masao Abe on Negativity in the East and the West” (handout);
Williams, “Dogen on the Buddha-nature” (handout, pp. 119-122).

Modern Buddhism in Asia and the West

- 7: Mitchell, *Modern Buddhism in Asia* (Ch. 10).

10 (Monday): Essay #2 due by 12:00 noon sharp in Ladd 217.

- 12: Mitchell, *Buddhism in the West* (Ch. 11).

There is no final exam for this course.

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 family emergency or a religious holiday. The following guidelines describe how attendance and participation will affect your grade:

A or A- = attend every class and make at least one useful contribution 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 don't eat during class (water, coffee/tea, or sodas are ok). Use of laptops is not permitted unless you have prior permission from me. Please be sure that your cell phone and other electronics are turned off.

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. I suggest that you work out a study schedule that sets aside a regular 2 ½ hour period of time to prepare for each class.

Your understanding of class discussions, and the quality of class discussion itself, depends on how well you have prepared the assignments, so do the assignments carefully—read actively and critically by underlining or highlighting, taking notes, outlining, and rereading. The study guides (see below) will also help you read our texts closely and critically.

(b) Discussion Focus: Twice during the semester I will ask you and another person in the course to focus our class discussion. You must discuss the reading with your partner outside of class and decide 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. This is not a formal presentation but a brief comment to raise an issue for class discussion.

(c) Study Guides: Written assignments on the reading will be assigned for almost every class. They will be graded pass/fail. They will be due at the beginning of class, and late study guides will receive no credit or only partial 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) Essays #1 and #2 (80%): Essay #1 (40%) is due at the beginning of class on Wednesday, November 7. We will discuss the topic in class. It should be 8-10 typed pages, and will count 40% of your final course grade. Essay #2 (40%) is due at the beginning of class on Monday, December 10. It should be 8-10 typed pages, and will count 40% of your final course grade. I will provide detailed written instructions for both essays.

Learning disability: If you have a certified learning disability, please let me know right away. Even if you don't have a certified disability, if you have concerns about how to learn in this course, don't hesitate to discuss them with me.

Honor Code: Skidmore has a strong honor code that I will strictly enforce. I will discuss issues about plagiarism when I give you the essay topics. Before then, read the Honor Code section in the Student Handbook about "Academic Policies," as well as the section on "Documentation and Plagiarism" in The Skidmore Guide to Writing. Skidmore considers unintentional plagiarism still to be plagiarism that earns serious sanctions, so read these sections in the Student Handbook and The Skidmore Guide to Writing carefully.

An invitation: Studying any religious philosophy is difficult because each one is subtle and complex. Studying any religious philosophy is also difficult because we explore sensitive issues that concern the most central meanings and deepest values of life. Studying Buddhism is especially difficult because its origins are in cultures that are very different from Western cultures and Buddhism has developed diverse forms in these non-Western cultures. Further, Western forms of Buddhism are still developing and haven't fully crystalized yet. In our study we must approach Buddhism openly, trying our best to understand it without bias on its own terms without judging it. Yet in dealing with it philosophically, we must also probe it and raise critical questions about it. Although studying Buddhism will be difficult, these challenges will make our study rich and exciting. I invite you to invest fully in your study of Buddhism to see what it has to say about living a wise and compassionate life.