

BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY

PH 215: Buddhist Philosophy
Skidmore College

Dr. Joel R. Smith
Spring, 2009

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.

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 (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. Gyatso, Khenpo Tsultrim, Rinpoche, Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness (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. Newland, Guy, Appearance and Reality: The Two Truths in the Four Buddhist Tenet Systems (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1999).
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, and Southeast Asia

- 21: Mitchell, The Life of Gautama Buddha (Ch. 1);
 Mitchell, The Teachings of Buddha (Ch. 2).
- 26: Mitchell, The Way of the Elders (Ch. 3);
 “There Is No Ego or Personal Identity; Rebirth is Not
 Transmigration.” (handout). DF1
- 28: The Dhammapada (all).

Mahayana Buddhism in India

- 2: Mitchell, The Great Vehicle (Ch. 4). DF2
- 4: A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life (Preface &
 Introduction and Ch. I, II, III). DF3
- 9: A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life (Ch. IV, V, VI). DF4
- 11: A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life (Ch. VII, VIII, X – not
 Ch. IX). DF5
- 16: Exam in class.
- 18: Practicing Wisdom (pp. vii-xiii in Editor’s Preface and Ch. 1-
 5); DF6
 A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life (read Ch. IX along
 with the relevant chapters in Practicing Wisdom).
- 23: Practicing Wisdom (Ch. 6-8) (along with Ch. IX of A Guide). DF7
- 25: Practicing Wisdom (Ch. 9-12) (along with Ch. IX of A Guide). DF8
- 2: Mitchell, The Indian Experience of Buddhism (Ch. 5); DF9
 Kasulis, “Nirvana” (handout).
- 4: Rabten, The Heart of Wisdom (Text &
 Commentary)(handout). DF10
- 6: Essay #1 due by 12:00 noon sharp on Friday.

- 9 Spring
 11 break

Vajrayana Buddhism in Tibet

- 16: Mitchell, The Tibetan Experience of Buddhism (Ch. 6). DF11
- 18: Appearance and Reality (Ch. 1-4); DF12

Progressive Stages, Comings & Goings (pp. ix-xi) &
Introduction (pp. 1-8) & Stage One: Shravaka (pp. 9-25).

- 23: Appearance and Reality: Mind Only System (Ch. 5); DF13
Progressive Stages, Stage Two: Cittamatra (pp. 27-43).
25: Appearance and Reality: The Middle Way System (Ch. 6). DF1

30: Appearance and Reality (Ch. 7); DF2
Progressive Stages, Stage Three: Svatantrika (pp. 45-53);
1: Appearance and Reality (Ch. 8-9); DF3
Progressive Stages, Stage Four: Prasangika (pp. 55-63) &
Stage Five: Shentong (pp. 65-79) & Conclusion (p. 81).
DF4

Zen Buddhism in Japan

- 6: Mitchell, The Chinese Experience of Buddhism (Ch. 7); DF5
Mitchell, The Japanese Experience of Buddhism (Ch. 9). DF6
8: Kasulis, Preface & Cultural Setting (pp. ix-15); DF7
Kasulis, Nagarjuna: The Logic of Emptiness (Ch. 2). DF8

13: Kasulis, Chinese Taoism (Ch. 3); DF9
Kasulis, No-Mind (Ch. 4);
Kasulis, Zen & Reality (Ch. 5);
Kasulis, Zen Action/Zen Person (Ch. 9). DF10

20: 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. 390-45).
22: 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);

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

Modern Buddhism in Asia and the West

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

4: (Monday): Essay #2 due in my office 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, 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 50 minutes long, so I expect you to spend at least 3 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) Exam (20%). An exam in class on February 16 will count 20% of your final course grade. It will consist primarily of identification of Buddhist terms. I will provide detailed written instructions later.

(3) Two essays (60%): Essay #1 is due in my office before you leave for spring break (by 12:00 noon on Friday, March 6 at the latest). It should be about 8 typed pages, and will count 30% of your final course grade. Essay #2 is due in my office on May 4 (the first day of exam week) by 12:00 noon sharp. It should be 8-10 typed pages, and will count 30% of your final course grade. I will provide detailed written instructions later.

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: 4:00- 5:00
Tuesday & Thursday: 2:00- 3:00
Friday: 11:00-12:00

Email: jsmith@skidmore.edu

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