

BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY

PH 215: Buddhist Philosophy
Spring, 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) Place Buddhist philosophy in the broader context of Buddhist religion (myths, rituals, symbols, meditations, art, politics).
- (4) Consider Buddhist philosophy in relation to Western philosophy and other Indian and Chinese philosophies.
- (5) Learn about the cultures of India, Tibet, Southeast Asia, China, and Japan through the study of Buddhism in those cultures.
- (6) Visit nearby Tibetan and Zen sites to observe contemporary Buddhism in the U.S. (These visits are optional.)
- (7) Develop subtle reading, writing, and analytical skills, including critical evaluation, by discussing readings in class and by writing essays about them.
- (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: 4:30- 5:30 p.m.
Tuesday & Thursday: 5:00- 6:00 p.m.
Friday: 11:00-12:00 a.m.

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 Live, 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

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

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

- 2: Mitchell, The Great Vehicle (Ch. 4).
- 7: A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life (Preface & Introduction & Ch. I, II, III, IV, V).
- 9: A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life (Ch. VI, VII, VIII, X & browse in Ch. IX).
- 14: Mitchell, Indian Experience of Buddhism (Ch. 5).
- 16: Rabten, The Heart of Wisdom (Text & Commentary) (handout);
Kasulis, "Nirvana" (handout).
- 21: Exam in class.

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

- 23: 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).
- 28: Tsering, Concepts of Selfhood (35-55);
Mitchell, Yogacara (149-153);
Gyatso, Stage Two: Cittamatra (27-43).
- 1: Gyatso. Stage Three: Svatantrika (45-53);
Tsering, Selflessness in Svatantrika Madhyamaka (55-59);
Tsering, Differences between Svatantrika and Prasangika (Ch. 4).
- 6: Gyatso, Stage Four: Prasangika (55-63);
Tsering, Prasangika's Unique Presentation of Emptiness (Ch. 5);
Mitchell, Prasangika (144-145).
- 8: Tsering, Emptiness and Dependent Arising (Ch. 7).
- 13 Spring
- 15 break

- 20: Gyamtso, Stage Five: Shentong (65-79) & Conclusion (p. 81)
 Mitchell, The Tathagatagarbha Literature (146-149);
 Williams, The Tathagatagarbha (handout: read 104-115;
 recommended: 115-128)
- 22: Review for essay topic.
- 27: Essay #1 due at the beginning of class; discuss topic in class.
- 29: Yeshe, Introduction to Tantra (Ch. 1-8)
- 30-1: Optional retreat at Zen Mountain Monastery.
- 3: Yeshe, Introduction to Tantra (Ch. 8-12 & Afterword).

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

- 5: Mitchell, The Chinese Experience of Buddhism (Ch. 7);
 Mitchell, The Japanese Experience of Buddhism (Ch. 9).
- 7 (Saturday): Optional day trip to Karma Triyana Dharmachakra.
- 10: Kasulis, Preface & Cultural Setting (pp. ix-15);
 Kasulis, Nagarjuna: The Logic of Emptiness (Ch. 2);
 Mitchell, Nagarjuna (139-144).
- 12: Kasulis, Chinese Taoism (Ch. 3);
 Kasulis, No-Mind (Ch. 4);
 Kasulis, Zen & Reality (Ch. 5);
 Kasulis, Zen Action/Zen Person (Ch. 9).
- 17: Dogen, Fukanzazengi (Universal Promotion of the Principle of Zazen)
 (1-6);
 Kasulis, Dogen's Phenomenology of Zazen (Ch. 6);
 Dogen, Bendowa (Negotiating the Way) (pp. 7-30);
 Dogen, Genjokoan (Manifesting Suchness) (pp. 39-45).
- 19: Kasulis, Dogen: Person as Presence (Ch. 7);
 Dogen, Uji (Being-time) (47-58);
 Mitchell, Zen Buddhism (296-301).
 [optional: Kasulis, Hakuin (Ch. 8)]

- 24: Abe, “Non-Being and *Mu*—the Metaphysical Nature of Negativity in the East and the West” (handout);
Smith, “Masao Abe on Negativity in the East and the West” (handout);
Williams, “Dogen on the Buddha-nature” (handout, pp. 119-122).
26: Essay #2 due at beginning of class; discuss topic in class.

Modern Buddhism in Asia and the West

- 1: Mitchell, *Modern Buddhism in Asia* (Ch. 10);
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. 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 don't eat during class (coffee/tea, water, 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.

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, highlighting, taking notes, outlining, and rereading.

(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.

(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 consisting primarily of terms to identify will be given in class on February 21 and will count 20% of your final course grade. I will provide detailed written instructions early in the course. (Please let me know right away if you are approved for extra time in taking an exam.)

(3) Essays #1 and #2 (60%): Essay #1 (30%) is due at the beginning of class on March 27. We will discuss the topic in class. It should be about 8 typed pages, and will count 30% of your final course grade. Essay #2 (30%) is due at the beginning of class on April 26. It should be about 8 typed pages, and will count 30% of your final course grade. I will provide detailed written instructions for both essays.