

RELG 356: INTRODUCTION TO BUDDHISM



Professor Daniel M. Stuart

Meetings: TBD

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Course Description

What are enlightenment and nirvana? Why and how do Buddhists meditate? What is it like to be a Buddhist today? One of the world's major religions, Buddhism began in India about 2,500 years ago. It spread in different forms across all of Asia and remains a creative force throughout the modern world. This course provides an introduction to Buddhist traditions from each of the three major cultural areas in which distinctive types of Buddhism have developed. We examine Theravāda Buddhism from Southeast Asia, Zen Buddhism from East Asia, and Indian-Tibetan Buddhism from South Asia. For each tradition, our emphasis is twofold: to acquaint ourselves with fundamental features of Buddhist thought and practice, and to get a taste of how Buddhists live nowadays amidst the complexities of real life. We therefore study both classical texts and contemporary auto/ biographies to compare and contrast a set of themes across traditions. Our themes include the religious goal, practices leading to the goal, religious community, and trials and triumphs in the lives of Buddhists, particularly female renunciants and masters. Along the way, we will also consider the presence of each type of Buddhism in America.

Learning Objectives

Upon successful completion of the course, students will be able to articulate fundamental ideals of Buddhist thought and practice from the three traditions that we study. Students will be able to connect the picture formed by those religious ideals to real cases of Buddhists' lives today. Students will be able to identify what is shared and what is unique among the Theravāda, Zen, and Indo-Tibetan traditions of Buddhism that we examine. Students will be able to articulate specific ways in which the study of Buddhism sheds light on important, broader issues presently debated within the study of religion.

Readings

- Links to course readings on Blackboard, with a focus on classical texts in English translation and on examples of practice from each tradition
- Rupert Gethin. *The Foundations of Buddhism*. Oxford University Press, 1998. ISBN-10: 0192892231. ISBN-13: 978-0192892232
- Faith Adiele. *Meeting Faith: The Forest Journals of a Black Buddhist Nun*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2005. Paperback (not hardcover). ISBN-10: 039332673X. ISBN-13: 978-0393326734
- The Third Dzogchen Rinpoche. *Great Perfection: Outer and Inner Preliminaries*. Translated by Cortland Dahl. Snow Lion Publications, 2007. ISBN-10: 1559392851. ISBN-13: 978-1559392853
- Chagdud Tulku. *Lord of the Dance: Autobiography of a Tibetan Lama*. Pilgrims Publishing, 2002. ISBN-10: 8177690922. ISBN-13: 978-8177690927
- Thomas Cleary. *Classics of Buddhism and Zen*. Volume Four. Shambhala, 2005. ISBN-10: 1590302214. ISBN-13: 978-1590302217

Requirements

- 20% — short written responses to weekly readings, due on most weeks as indicated on the course website. The responses will be based on writing prompts posted online. **Responses are due at 5 pm on the day before the final class of each week, and should be uploaded in PDF format to Blackboard.** A response should be between 200 and 250 words in length. These short reflections provide a valuable opportunity to think about the assigned readings prior to our last class discussion of each week. They will be graded on a credit/no credit basis. Only responses submitted on-time will be accepted.
- 20% — midterm exam; **Midterm exam date: TBD**
- 25% — 4-6 page interpretive essay. The essay is based on prior lectures and readings. Additional reading is not necessary. Students choose a topic from among a set of prompts that will be posted online. Alternatively, students may propose an original topic and have it approved by the instructor at least one week before the due date. The essay will require a close engagement with one or more of our primary sources. It will be evaluated both for quality of thought and quality of expression. **Topics are given on TBD. Papers are due on TBD.**

(for guidelines and expectations, see the handout on writing an interpretive essay)
- 35% — comprehensive final exam with an emphasis on course material since the midterm; **Final Exam Date: TBD**
- *participation* — participation forms an important part of the course. Meaningful contributions to class discussions and other in-class activities enhance everyone's learning experience. Consistent contributions can lift a student's final grade by as much as one full grade, e.g., from a B+ to an A-. Students should feel free to discuss the quality of their class participation with the instructor at any point during the semester.

Attendance—Prompt and regular attendance is crucial for success in the course. Attendance will be taken at the start of each class. **Attendance is mandatory, and if you miss more than three class sessions, you will lose 3% of your grade for every additional class missed.** If you are absent for an excusable reason, be sure to present the needed documentation to the instructor immediately upon your return (e.g., if you are absent for a legitimate medical reason, bring a doctor's note as soon as you come back to class).

Grading Scale 100-90 A; 89-87 B+; 86-80 B; 79-77 C+; 76-70 C; 69-67 D+; 66-60 D; below 60 F

Electronic Devices: cellphone, smartphones, and other non-academic electronic devices are **NOT** permitted in class. If you use any such device during class time, you will be asked to leave and be counted as absent. Students should take notes using pen/pencil and paper.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity: As students at USC, you are bound by the University of South Carolina Honor Code. All work produced for RELG 356 must be your own. The professor does not tolerate cheating or plagiarism under any circumstances. By enrolling in the course and accepting the terms of this syllabus, you indicate your acceptances of this policy. Instances of cheating will immediately result in a zero for the assignment, and the professor reserves the right to pursue more drastic action with the Office of Academic Integrity and the University administration.

WEEKLY OUTLINE OF TOPICS AND READINGS

Week 1. Studying Buddhism: Promises and Pitfalls

subtopics: scholarly approaches toward religion in religious studies; the historical spread of Buddhism across time and space; one Buddhism or many Buddhisms?; potentially problematic assumptions about religion in religious studies, Buddhist critiques of academic analyses of Buddhism; Buddhism--strange or familiar?

readings:

- Bronkhorst 2007, pp. 13-54 (available on Blackboard)
- Gethin *Foundations of Buddhism* chapter 10

Week 2. The Life of the Buddha as a Religious Paradigm [September 2nd: no class--Labor Day]

readings:

- Shaw 2006 *The Jatakas*, pp. 66-74, Lomahamsajātaka (available on Blackboard)
- Bodhi and Nanamoli 1995 *Middle Length Discourses*, pp. 332-343, *Mahasaccakasutta*
- Bodhi and Nanamoli 1995 *Middle Length Discourses*, pp. 253-269, *Ariyapariyesanasutta* (available on Blackboard)
- Gethin *Foundations of Buddhism* chapter 1
- Jayawickrama 2000 *The Story of Gotama Buddha*, pp. 63-101 (available on Blackboard)

Week 3. The Three Jewels of Buddhism: Enlightened Being, Teaching, and Community

readings:

- Gethin *Foundations of Buddhism* chapters 2 and 3
- Bodhi 2000 *Connected Discourses*, pp. 1843-1847, *Setting in Motion the Wheel of Dharma* (available on Blackboard)
- Gethin *Foundations of Buddhism* chapter 5

Week 4. Classical Theravāda Buddhist Thought and Practice: the Pali *Nikāyas*

readings:

- Gethin *Foundations of Buddhism* chapters 6
- Bodhi 2000 *Connected Discourses*, pp. 901-903, *The Characteristic of Non-self* (available on Blackboard)
- Gethin *Foundations of Buddhism* chapter 7

Week 5. Complexities in Theravādin Thought, Practice, and Institutions

readings:

- Gethin *Foundations of Buddhism* chapters 4
- Gethin *Foundations of Buddhism* chapter 8
- Bodhi 1993 *Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*, pp. 23-75, *Compendium of Consciousness* (available on Blackboard)

Week 6. Autobiography: A Black American Woman Meets Theravāda Buddhism

readings:

- Faith Adiele. *Meeting Faith: The Forest Journals of a Black Buddhist Nun*, pp. 13-59
- *Meeting Faith*, pp. 61-103
- *Meeting Faith*, pp. 105-167

Week 7. Theravāda today: From Modern Forest Traditions to the Widespread Applications of Mindfulness in Contemporary Society

readings:

- *Meeting Faith*, pp. 169-216
- *Meeting Faith*, pp. 219-281

Study all previous material for comprehensive midterm.

Midterm Exam

Week 8. Introduction to Indo-Tibetan Buddhism: Mahāyāna, the Great Way

readings:

- Gethin *Foundations of Buddhism* chapter 9
- The Third Dzogchen Rinpoche. *Great Perfection: Outer and Inner Preliminaries*, pp. xii-xx and 1-15
- *Great Perfection*, pp. 17-35

Week 9. Indo-Tibetan Buddhism: Vajrayāna, the Adamantine Way

readings:

- *Great Perfection*, pp. 37-90
- *Great Perfection*, pp. 91-139
- *Great Perfection*, pp. 141-172

Week 10. A Modern Tibetan Buddhist Life

readings:

- Chagdud Tulku. *Lord of the Dance: Autobiography of a Tibetan Lama*, pp. xi-44
- *Lord of the Dance*, pp. 45-102
- *Lord of the Dance*, pp. 103-150

* **Paper topics distributed Nov. 1st.**

Week 11. Contemporary Tibetan Buddhism

readings:

- *Lord of the Dance*, pp. 151-199
- *Lord of the Dance*, pp. 200-238
- Latour 2013 *Rejoicing*, pp. 1-15 (available on Blackboard)

Week 12. Zen Myths: Zen History, Zen Institutions, and Challenges in Scholarly Study

readings:

- Dumoulin 2005 [1988] *Zen Buddhism: A History*, pp. 41-59 and pp. 85-106 (available on Blackboard)
- Yampolsky 1967 *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, pp. 125-183 (available on Blackboard)
- Broughton 1999 *The Bodhidharma Anthology*, pp. 9-12 (available on Blackboard)
- McRae 2003 *Seeing Through Zen*, pp. xix-21, *Looking at Lineage* (available on Blackboard)

*** Papers due on Friday, Nov. 15 in class.**

Week 13. Zen: the Paradoxes of Original Enlightenment

readings:

- Thomas Cleary. *Classics of Buddhism and Zen*. Volume Four, pp. 19-25; pp. 121-147; pp. 210-225
- *Classics of Buddhism and Zen*, pp. 419-432; pp. 451-463; pp. 470-488
- *Classics of Buddhism and Zen*, pp. 525-528; pp. 642-647; pp. 721-723; pp. 733-736; pp. 809-811; pp. 865-871

Week 14. Zen in America

readings:

Browse the websites, provided on Blackboard, containing information on the following American Zen personalities and come to class prepared for discussion:

- Suzuki Roshi
- Maezumi Roshi
- Bernie Glassman
- John Daido Looi
- Jan Chozen Bays

Week 15. Taking Stock of What We Have Learned about Buddhism and Religion

subtopics: dimensions of religion: narratives, tenets, praxis (ritual, meditation, asceticism), communal life, ethnography, social institutions and structures, politics, philosophy, ethics, ontology, psychology, epistemology, cosmology, soteriology, orality and writing. Changing traditions: Buddhism past and present. Areas for further study.

Comprehensive Final Exam: TBD