

INTRODUCTION TO INDIAN BUDDHISM
AEAS 265 (Class No. 8842) / AREL 265 (Class No. 9106):
Fall 2008

Class Time and Location: MW 2:45–4:05 in Physics 123
Instructor: Mark Blum, Associate Professor
Office: HU 254e
Office Hours: Monday & Wednesday 1:00–2:00
Phone: 442-4183
e-mail: mblum@albany.edu

Textbooks

What the Buddha Taught by Walpola Rahula
(Grove Weidenfield, 1959). ISBN: 0802130313
The Foundations of Buddhism by Rupert Gethin
(Oxford University Press, 1998). ISBN: 019289223-1
The Myth of Freedom by Chogyam Trungpa
(Shambhala 2002). ISBN: 1570629331
ERes readings available through library ERes website

Prerequisites

This is a survey course with no prior knowledge of Buddhism, India, or its religious traditions required.

Course Description & Objectives

This course is an introduction to the culture, values, and history of the religion known as Buddhism in its original Indian setting. Our objective is critical discussion of broad range of questions: how to identify the distinguishing aspects of what we call Buddhism within the context of Indian religion and philosophy from which it sprang, what Buddhist values have to say about the cultural forms created by human society and its own competing social institutions, how religious deliverance or liberation is defined, the Buddhist way of life in theory and practice for both monastics and lay, and where the contradictions and paradoxes lie among the different voices identified as having the authority to speak for Buddhism in India. Although Buddhism can be studied from a variety of perspectives, this course will focus primarily on philosophical and religious issues of concern to the Buddhist tradition. Students are encouraged through their own research, however, to contribute to our collective learning experience by contributing other viewpoints, such as artistic, economic, political, etc., as these topics will never be excluded from our discussions but due to time constraints will have to play a supportive role.

Students are expected to attend all classes and being properly prepared means to have read the relevant reading assignment beforehand. There will be a considerable amount of material covered in this class, and while the total amount of pages to read is not great, the nature of the material requires concentration. No repeating of lectures or makeup exams for absentees is possible. If you know you are going to miss a class unavoidably, you must let me know ahead of time to be excused. Since the class only meets twice a week, any absences will have a major impact on what you retain.

Grading

Grading is either A-E or S/U and based on five areas of student performance, as explained below.

1) general class preparation and participation, 2) two small homework assignments, 3) midterm and final examinations, 4) a research paper, 5) a short, 5-7 minute oral presentation summarizing the results of the research paper.

1) **Classwork:** You will be expected to attend all classes and to have done the required reading as indicated in the syllabus before coming to class. If you cannot attend class due to illness or other pressing business, it is your responsibility to learn what was discussed that day by means of borrowing notes from another student.

2) **Homework:** There will be two written assignments, each only ONE page. The restriction to one page should be understood to mean that the instructor expects a tight philosophical presentation of what you choose to include as relevant material. These must be typed, and should be well written, with all sources properly noted, including class lectures and anything from the Internet. NOTE: Students are **discouraged** from using Internet sources unless they can be demonstrated to be of sufficient academic or religious authority. If you choose to use Internet sources, you must give the source URL or this will be considered plagiarism.

3) **Midterm and Final Examinations:** Generally speaking the midterm will cover the early Buddhism and the Final will cover Mahāyāna. BUT, if you do not understand the basic themes of early Buddhism your understanding of Mahāyāna will be skewed. The Final Exam will therefore require relevant comparisons of doctrines and practices, and your preparation must include Early Buddhist thought and practice as well. Both exams will have both identification and short essays. In principle makeup exams will not be given, but in unavoidable absences this may occur with prior consent of the instructor.

4) **Research Paper:** You will write a critical analysis of any short Buddhist scripture, or a chapter in a long Buddhist scripture. It is also acceptable to write on an idea, famous individual, or institution, but this usually takes more preparation time. The best papers contain a detailed critical analysis of the text along with a summary of what is known historically about when the text was written and the nature of its impact. The written length should be between 5 and 10 pages and is due the day you give your presentation. Regarding content:

1) Don't take the book-report approach: a mere summary of either the contents of the text you read or someone's research on it will result in a lower grade. Don't merely present your opinions: whether you liked or didn't like your material is not the point.

2) Do try to present a thoughtful analysis: Your insights are valuable and if presented responsibly and coherently will result in a higher grade. Do state why you appreciated or what you learned from the text or topic, and do it a way that is precise on what it was that impressed you and why.

3) All students should review the description of *how* to write a research paper posted on the dept. website under the name "East Asian Studies Style Guide For Writing Papers"

4) Plagiarism will not be tolerated. You are responsible for abiding by the department policy regarding plagiarism posted at <http://www.albany.edu/eas/104/plagiary.htm>. Failure to comply will result in zero credit and notification to the dean of students.

5) **Presentation:** You will present a summary of your research paper in class on the day you hand it in. This will last only 5 to 7 minutes. Because this is very brief, the best presentations are those in which the presenter does not read the paper but presents a coherent summary of the paper's contents (rather than the sutra's contents, although some mention of the sutra's contents is necessary). If necessary, prepare note cards or an outline to help guide you, and always remember to ask for questions at the end.

Grading Scheme:

Classwork/Preparation	15%
Homework	10%
Research Paper	20%
Oral Presentation	10%
Midterm Exam	20%
Final Exam	25%

Grading Scale: 93-100%=A; 90-92%=A-; 87-89%=B+; 83-86%=B; 80-82%=B-; 77-79%=C+; 73-76%=C; 70-72%=C-; 67-69%=D+; 63-66%=D; 60-62%=D-; 0-59%=E.

Class Schedule

Readings are from *The Myth of Freedom (Freedom)*, *What the Buddha Taught (B-Taught)*, *The Foundations of Buddhism (FofB)*, and ERes files (ERes)
Pāli Canon Readings?

	Topics	Readings
Aug 25	Class outline	
Aug 27	Godless religion: anxiety as a religious problem	<i>Freedom</i> ch. 1
Sept 1	no class (Labor Day holiday)	<i>Freedom</i> ch. 2
Sept 3	Buddhist geography, linguistic issues, historical context in India in the 4th/5th century BCE.	<i>B-Taught</i> ch. 1; <i>FofB</i> p. 7-13 (p. 1-6 optional)
Sept 8	Life of the Buddha; the meaning of <i>buddha</i>	<i>FofB</i> p. 13-34
Sept 10	The 4 Truths. truth #1: <i>duḥkha</i> (the problem)	<i>B-Taught</i> ch. 2 & p. 91-94; <i>FofB</i> p. 59-68
Sept 15	truths #2 & #3: origins of <i>duḥkha</i> & elimination of <i>duḥkha (nirvāṇa)</i>	<i>B-Taught</i> ch. 3 & 4, p. 53-54; <i>FofB</i> p. 68-79
Sept 17	1st homework due. truth #4: the Path I—karma & ethics	<i>B-Taught</i> chs. 5; <i>FofB</i> p. 79-84, 163-174
Sept 22	The Path II—meditation (bring B-Taught to class)	<i>B-Taught</i> ch. 7; <i>Freedom</i> ch. 3
Sept 24	Scriptures & Schools in India	<i>FofB</i> ch. 2
Sept 29	no class	
Oct 1	no class	
Oct 6	film	(<i>FofB</i> p. 174-203 optional)
Oct 8	library day	
Oct 13	2nd homework due. The Community (<i>saṅgha</i>)	<i>FofB</i> ch. 4
Oct 15	Doctrines: nonself, epistemology, three marks; Abhidharma hermeneutics	<i>FofB</i> ch. 8
Oct 20	MIDTERM EXAM	
Oct 22	Intro to Mahāyāna thought and culture	<i>FofB</i> p.224-237; <i>Freedom</i> chs. 6 & 7
Oct 27	Sutra readings I	<i>ERes</i>
Oct 29	Sutra readings II	<i>ERes</i>
Nov 3	guest lecture on Lotus Sutra	<i>ERes</i>
Nov 5	Nāgārjuna	<i>FofB</i> p. 237-244; <i>ERes</i>
Nov 10	2nd homework due. Yogācāra & Tathāgatagarbha	<i>FofB</i> p. 244-252; <i>ERes</i>
Nov 12	Logic & Tantra	<i>Freedom</i> ch. 8; <i>FofB</i> p. 266-273
Nov 17	Historical spread outside India	<i>FofB</i> p. 253-266
Nov 19	Buddhism today; ecoBuddhism	<i>B-Taught</i> ch. 8; <i>FofB</i> p. 273-276
Nov 24	Student Presentations	
Nov 26	no class	
Dec 1	Student Presentations	
Dec 3	Student Presentations	
Dec 8	Review	
Dec 10(W)	FINAL EXAM at 3:30 – 5:30PM	