

READINGS IN BUDDHIST TEXTS EAS 393 & REL 393 Spring 2009

Class Time and Location: MW 4:15–5:35 in HU 114

Instructor: Mark Blum

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Office Hours: TTh 1:00–2:00

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ERes password:

Required Textbooks:

The Dhammapada: The Sayings of the Buddha, ed. & tr. by John Ross Carter and Mahinda Palihawadana (Oxford University Press, 2000).

The Vimalakirti Sutra, tr. by Burton Watson (Columbia University Press, 1997)

Course Reader

Books and Course Reader are available at Mary Jane Books located at the corner of Western and Quail streets.

Prerequisites:

One prior course in Buddhist thought is required for this course. This may be any of the courses taught on Buddhism at this university in East Asian Studies, Religious Studies, or Philosophy. Students who do not meet the prerequisite requirement may be admitted with permission of the instructor, and this will require additional reading. Without a grounding in basic Buddhist doctrine, a student will be seriously handicapped. The course and all the readings will be in English.

Course Description:

This course will explore reading in seven classic Buddhist scriptures from Buddhist Asia, written in India, Central Asia, and China. Generally reading will be restricted to the Buddhist texts designated above as Required Textbooks, and we will be focused on reading these works closely and carefully, with critical discussions to follow. The texts are either Indian in origin or adaptations of Buddhist beliefs written outside of India that nevertheless conform to Indian models in form, if not necessarily in content.

The format will be seminar-like, with some readings in class but most time devoted to discussion. It is therefore imperative to do the assigned readings before class and to attend all classes, as each meeting will be concentrated and cannot be repeated. The *Dhammapada* and *Sutta-nipāta* are among the earliest Buddhist texts and is widely read within the monastic communities of South and Southeast Asia. We will then look at the *Lotus Sutra* as an example of early Mahāyāna raising new questions about nonself, the nature of buddha, emptiness, expedient means, universality, and faith. The *Nirvana Sutra* represents middle Mahāyāna teachings that incorporate both the supreme teaching of Emptiness and Non-emptiness, adding the tathāgatagarbha doctrine of buddha-nature. The *Awakening of Faith* is considered to have been composed in Chinese held Central Asia in the sixth century, and represents a Chinese expression of many of the core teachings in the *Nirvana Sutra*. Finally we will look at mythic and political concerns, in

particular kingship, as expressed in *The Sutra of Golden Light*. Reflecting a later development; here we have an essentially occult appeal to kings, a positive embrace of animals, and a mythologizing of the Buddhist preacher as hero in a world peopled with spirits and demons.

Students are expected to have read the reading assignment prior to coming to class and to bring the relevant reading material with them to class. It is advisable to keep this syllabus closeby for reference and keep abreast of changes that may emerge. If a student misses a class, he/she is still responsible for that content, including information relevant to homework.

Grading:

Assessment will be based on four areas of performance: class preparation and participation, three short (2-3 pages) critical review papers assigned as homework, a research paper of 8-12 pages, and a final exam based on readings and class discussions. There will be no midterm exam. The review papers are based on the readings and do not require outside research *but* they must be typed and must be turned in during the class they are due: these will not be accepted late. Consult with instructor if you expect to miss class, particularly on a day when something is due. Research papers will be accepted late with a penalty of one grade increment lowered per day. No electronic submissions accepted for either homework or research paper without prior approval. As this is a “second-tier” course with a prerequisite, the research paper should reflect a fairly detailed look into the Buddhist topic of your choice, using multiple sources, and with a proper bibliography and footnotes or endnotes as necessary for citation and/or explanation.

Class preparation and participation:	20%
Written assignments	30%
Research Paper	30%
Final	20%

Schedule:

Readings are all in the required texts: *The Dhammapada*, the *The Vimalakirti Sutra*, and the *Course Reader* (abbreviated CR).

	Topic	Reading
Jan. 21	Distribution of Syllabus, course outline	
Jan. 26	Lecture on Buddhist Canon	
Jan. 28	<i>Dhammapada</i>	<i>Dhammapada: xi–xxvi, 3-9</i>
Feb. 2	<i>Dhammapada</i>	<i>Dhammapada: 10-29</i>
Feb. 4	<i>Dhammapada</i>	<i>Dhammapada: 30-51</i>
Feb. 9	<i>Sutta-nipāta</i>	CR: <i>Sutta-nipāta</i>
Feb. 11	First review paper due. Discussion	
Feb. 16	Winter Break	
Feb. 18	Winter Break	
Feb. 23	<i>Lotus Sutra</i>	CR: <i>Lotus Sutra 1</i>
Feb. 25	<i>Lotus Sutra</i>	CR: <i>Lotus Sutra 2</i>
Mar. 2	<i>Lotus Sutra</i>	CR: <i>Lotus Sutra 3</i>

Mar. 4	<i>Vimalakirti Sutra</i>	<i>Vimalakirti Sutra: 1-31</i>
Mar. 9	<i>Vimalakirti Sutra</i>	<i>Vimalakirti Sutra: 32-63</i>
Mar. 11	<i>Vimalakirti Sutra</i>	<i>Vimalakirti Sutra: 64-92</i>
Mar. 16	<i>Vimalakirti Sutra</i>	<i>Vimalakirti Sutra: 93-111</i>
Mar. 18	Second review paper due. Discussion	
Mar. 23	<i>Nirvana Sutra</i>	CR: <i>Nirvana Sutra Reading 1</i>
Mar. 25	<i>Nirvana Sutra</i>	CR: <i>Nirvana Sutra Reading 2</i>
Mar. 30	<i>Nirvana Sutra</i>	CR: <i>Nirvana Sutra Reading 3</i>
Apr. 1	<i>Nirvana Sutra</i>	CR: <i>Nirvana Sutra Reading 4</i>
Apr. 6	<i>Awakening of Faith</i>	CR: <i>Awakening of Faith 1</i>
Apr. 8	Spring Break	
Apr. 13	Spring Break	
Apr. 15	<i>Awakening of Faith</i>	CR: <i>Awakening of Faith 2</i>
Apr. 20	<i>Awakening of Faith</i>	CR: <i>Awakening of Faith 3</i>
Apr. 22	<i>Sutra of Golden Light</i>	CR: <i>Sutra of Golden Light 1</i>
Apr. 27	Third review paper due. Discussion & <i>Sutra of Golden Light</i> reading	CR: <i>Sutra of Golden Light 2</i>
Apr. 29	<i>Sutra of Golden Light</i>	CR: <i>Sutra of Golden Light 3</i>
May 4	Research papers due. Review	
May 7	3:30–5:30PM Final Exam	