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RELS 232.01: Introduction to Buddhism

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RS/LS 232
Buddhism
Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays
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The main purpose of this course is to familiarize ourselves with the basic categories of philosophy and practice in Buddhism, a pan-Asian religious tradition of remarkable diversity and expansive geographical and chronological scope. While the course will always maintain an historical perspective, in order to provide us with a framework for understanding Buddhist developments in their cultural and temporal contexts, the course will be structured mainly along thematic lines, according to the traditional concepts of the “Three Jewels or Refuges”: Buddha (awakened being, exemplar, teacher); Dharma (teachings, doctrine); and Sangha (community), and the “Three Trainings”: Sila (ethics, morality, virtue); Samadhi (meditation, contemplation); and Prajna (wisdom, transformative insight). Following this structure, we will closely read primary sources (in translation) and secondary studies, in order to explore how Buddhists, from ancient to modern times, have viewed the world and lived their lives in the cultural settings of South and Southeast Asia (Theravada Buddhism), East Asia (Mahayana Buddhism), and the Tibetan and Himalayan regions of Asia (Tantric or Vajrayana Buddhism).

Required Readings (all are available for purchase at the campus bookstore):

Kohn, Sherab Chodzin. *The Awakened One*.
Nichtern, Ethan. *One City: A Declaration of Interdependence*
Rahula, Walpola. *What the Buddha Taught*.
Santideva. *The Bodhicaryavatara*.
Suzuki, Shunryu. *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*.
Williams, Paul. *Mahayana Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*
Yeshe, Lama. *Introduction to Tantra: The Transformation of Desire*.

Grading

1. Class Preparation and Participation: completion of and reflection upon the reading assignment for the day, as well as consistent attendance and oral participation in regular discussions. No more than one absence will be accepted without written authorization from the Health Service or an advisor, counselor, or administrator. (20% of the final grade).
2. Two exams: Mid-Term and Final Exams (each is worth 40% of the final grade, making the two equal 80% total).

Class Meetings and Assignments

I. Buddha: Awakened One, Exemplar, Teacher, Savior

- Mon. 5/24 Introduction to the Course and the Socio-Religious Context of the Buddha's Life
- Tues. 5/25 The Life of Siddhartha Gautama, Sakyamuni Buddha
-Kohn: Chapters 1-5
- Wed. 5/26 The Life of the Buddha (continued)
-Kohn: Chapters 6-9
- Thurs. 5/27 Buddha as Supramundane Being
-Williams, "Buddhism: Doctrinal Diversity and Moral Unity" (pp. 1-7) and "Mahasamghikas and Lokottaravada" (pp. 18-21)
-handout: Roger Corliss, "Birth of Buddhas" (from *The Vision of Buddhism*)
- Mon. 5/31 Devotional Buddhism: The Pure Land Traditions
-Williams: Chapter 10, pp. 209-212, 214-218, and 238-266
-handout: *The Smaller Sutra Displaying the Land of Bliss*
- Tues. 6/1 Buddhist Imagery: Early Buddhist Representations of Buddha & Later Artistic Icons of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas
-Williams: pp. 210-237
-in-class visual presentation
- Wed. 6/2 The Fundamental Teachings of Buddhist Philosophy
-Rahula: Chapters II, VI, and III, and pp. 92-94
-handout: "King Milinda and Nagasena's Chariot Simile"
- Thurs. 6/3 The Fundamental Teachings of Buddhist Philosophy
-Rahula: Chapters IV and V
-handout: selections from Theravada Buddhism's "Pali Canon"
- **Evening Documentary Showing: "Footsteps of the Buddha****
- Mon. 6/7 Buddhist Meditation I: Theravada Buddhist Meditation
- handout: Damine Keown, "Meditation" (from *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction*)
-handout: Shinzen Young, "Buddhist Meditation" (from *The Buddhist Religion*)
- **Evening Documentary Showing: "Doing Time, Doing Vipassana****

- Tues. 6/8 Buddhist Ethics I: The Layperson's Morality of Giving, the Five Precepts, and Merit-Making
-handout: Peter Harvey, *Introduction to Buddhist Ethics* (pp. 60-88 and 97-122)
- Wed. 6/9 Reformation in Buddhist Thought: The Rise of Mahayana Buddhism and its *Prajna-Paramita* ("Perfection of Wisdom") Literature
-Williams: "Abhidharma," (pp. 15-18), "The Justification of Mahayana Sutras," (pp. 38-44), and Chapter 2
-handout: The *Hridaya* ("Heart") *Sutra*
-handout: Geshe Rabten, commentary on the *Heart Sutra*
- Thurs. 6/10 The Systemization and Elucidation of "Perfection of Wisdom" Thought: Nagarjuna and the Madhyamaka School
-Williams: Chapter 3
-handout: Chapter 24 of Nagarjuna's *Mulamadhyamakakarikas*
- Mon. 6/14 ****Mid-Term Exam****
- Tues. 6/15 Mahayana Buddhist Teachings on Mind and Buddha-Nature
Williams, pp. 84-88, 92-100, 103-109, & 119-122
-handout: selections from Cittamatra ("Mind-Only") or Yogacara ("Yoga Practice") and Tathagatagarbha ("Buddha-Womb") literature
- Wed. 6/16 Buddhist Meditation II: Zen and the Realization of Buddha-Nature
-Suzuki, selections
****Evening Documentary Showing: "The Land of the Disappearing Buddha: Japan"*****
- Thurs. 6/17 Buddhist Ethics II: The Bodhisattva and the Way of Compassion
-Santideva: *Bodhicaryavatara*, General Introduction and Chapters 1-5
- Mon. 6/21 Buddhist Ethics II: The Bodhisattva and the Way of Compassion (continued)
-Santideva: *Bodhicaryavatara*, Chapters 6, 7, 8, and 10
****Evening Documentary Showing: "A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life"**
- Tues. 6/22 Buddhist Meditation III: Tantra and the Practice of "Diety Yoga"
-Yeshe: Chapters 1-4 and 10-12
****Evening Documentary Showing: "Mandala: The Sacred Circle of Vajrabhairava"**
- Wed. 6/23 A New (?) Vision of a World Sangha
Nichtern, selections
- Thurs. 6/24 A New (?) Vision of a World Sangha
Nichtern, selections.

****Fri. 6/25 Final Exam****