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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*
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 Lokottara Avada” (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 Mediation” (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 Mediation 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**