

Religious Studies 258
Asian Studies 150

Buddhism



Rhodes College

Fall 2015

12:00 Noon, Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays

[Professor Mark W. Muesse](#)

Religious Studies 258

Asian Studies 150

Buddhism

Inaugurated in the religious ferment of Northern India nearly 2500 years ago, Buddhism became the world's first international religion. From modest beginnings, Buddhist perspectives and practices went on to shape the character of almost all Asian cultures. It is virtually impossible to understand these cultures fully without a clear grasp of the Buddhist influence.

Today, Buddhism remains a vibrant tradition whose relevancy has never been greater and whose influence appears to be growing, even in the West. Albert Einstein considered Buddhism the most promising religion for the modern world and its scientific outlook.

Buddhism has the characteristics of what would be expected in a cosmic religion for the future: It transcends a personal God, avoids dogmas and theology; it covers both the natural and spiritual; and it is based on a religious sense aspiring from the experience of all things, natural and spiritual, as a meaningful unity.

Einstein's description aptly captures much of what makes Buddhism attractive to many in the contemporary world.

This course studies the entire range of Buddhist history and experience. Beginning with Buddhism's Indian antecedents, we move to explore in detail the life and teachings of Siddhattha Gotama, the individual who became the Buddha. We continue by tracing the expansion of the Buddhist movement throughout the world, as it crystallized into its major varieties. Throughout, the course will attend to Buddhism's uniqueness as well as its similarities to other religions and philosophies.

Resources

Rupert Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. 978-0192892232

Glenn Wallis, *Basic Teachings of the Buddha*. New York: Modern Library, 2007. 978-0812975239

Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of Understanding: Commentaries on the Prajnaparamita Heart Sutra*. Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1988. 978-1888375923

Shantideva, *The Way of the Bodhisattva: A Translation of the Bodhicharyavatara*. Trans. Padmakara Translation Committee. Boston: Shambhala, 2003. 978-1590303887

Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*. Boston and London: Shambhala, 2006. 978-1590308493

Zen Flesh, Zen Bones: A Collection of Zen and Pre-Zen Writings. Ed. Paul Reps. North Clarendon, VT: Tuttle Publishing, 1998. 978-0804831864

Leonard Koren, *Wabi Sabi for Artists, Designers, Poets, and Philosophers*. Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 1994. 978-0981484600

Other readings and video resources are available on Moodle.

Course Requirements

The requirements for this course are as follows:

Participation: 10%

Your participation grade comprises your contributions to the discussions and your involvement in out-of-class events related to the course. The elements of the participation grade include:

Preparation: It is important to come to class adequately prepared, having read the assignments and thoughtfully considered them. The Course Outline below indicates the readings that should be completed *prior* to class meetings. Please bring the day's reading with you to class.

Contributions to Discussions: It is essential that you contribute to the colloquia. If you have difficulty speaking up in class, please see me. I can offer you several strategies for contributing to class discussions.

Out-of-Class Activities: You are also invited (but not required) to participate in a daylong meditation retreat at the [Tennessee Buddhist Vihara](#) on 5 September, 9:00 AM-4:00 PM. You are also invited to attend field trips to the [India Cultural Center and Temple](#) and [India Fest](#) with my Religious Traditions of India class.

Films: You are required to view **three** films on Buddhist themes and write a 2 pp. paper on each, discussing its relevance to the course. These papers will not be graded, but failure to submit them will count against your grade in the course. The films include, but are not limited to, the following:

- *Why Has Bodhidharma Left for the East?*
- *Angulimala*
- *Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter... and Spring*
- *Kundun*
- *The Burmese Harp*
- *Siddhartha*
- *Zen Buddhism: In Search of Self*

- *Zen: The Life of Dogen*
- *The Drummer*
- *Milarepa*
- *Unmistaken Child*
- *Lost Horizon*

The films are on Moodle and may be viewed on your own at any time. This assignment must be completed by the last day of classes.

Quizzes: 15%

There will be eleven unannounced short quizzes during the course of the semester. These quizzes will test your comprehension of the day's assignment. There will be no make-ups for missed quizzes, but I will drop the lowest score.

Writing Assignments: 30%

You will be asked to submit three essays at various times during the semester. The essays are designed to give you an opportunity to respond critically and creatively to the reading material, discussions, and course activities. Each writing assignment is worth 10% of the final grade.

Midterm and Final Examination: 45%

There will be a midterm and a final examination; the midterm test is worth 20% of the final grade and final is worth 25%. They will comprise identification and essay questions. I will provide study guides for both exams.

Course Policies

Attendance Policy

It is essential to attend class. What you learn from participating in the course goes beyond what can be measured on papers and other forms of evaluation. I do not reckon absences as excused or unexcused. If you choose to miss class to participate in an extracurricular or other activity, your choice indicates the priority you give to this course and the grade you receive will reflect that decision. Each student is permitted three absences during the semester without an adverse effect on the grade. After the third absence, however, each subsequent absence will lower the final numeric average by one point. Missing one-third of the class sessions will result in an automatic failure in the course.

Electronic Devices

Our classroom is a **Wi-Fi cold spot**. The use of laptop computers, cell phones, and other media players is not permitted in class. All electronic devices must be turned off and kept off table tops and desks.

Written Assignments

All work submitted for this course should be the product of your own efforts. Students are expected to abide by the [Honor Code](#). Late papers will not be accepted unless you have made prior arrangements with me. See **How I Grade Essays** below for more information and hints to improve writing for this course.

Incompletes

An incomplete grade may be given to a student who is unable to complete the required coursework because of illness or other extenuating circumstances. Students wishing to receive an incomplete must consult with me prior to the due date of the final paper. Upon my approval, the student must submit the appropriate application to the Registrar before final grades are due. All unfinished work must then be completed and submitted by the end of the second week of the following semester.

Communication

I encourage you to check your e-mail frequently for announcements and other matters concerning this course. I will use the e-mail to communicate with you collectively and individually. It is often easier to contact me through e-mail than by telephone. My e-mail address is muesse@rhodes.edu.

Grace

You may have observed that it is not a perfect world, and from time-to-time, we all need a little slack. I recognize this. There may come a time when you need to turn in a late paper or want some other *slight* bend of the rules. You can count on *one* act of grace during the semester to help get you back on track. But since I'm not god, my supply of grace is limited. Don't count on getting *too much* slack. (Grace is not forgiveness; you must ask for it *in advance* of your transgression!)

Office Information

My office is located in 411 Clough. You may drop in during office hours: MTWF, 1:30-3:00 PM. If these times are not convenient for you, please call or e-mail me to make an appointment for another time. My campus number is 901 843 3909, and my home number is 901 278 0788.

Classroom Etiquette

Beginning

We will begin each class with a bow in the traditional Buddhist fashion. At my cue, please rise, place palms together (*añjali mudra*), and bow together. After taking our seats again, we will pause for a few moments for cultivating mindfulness.

Middle

Pay attention—or at least feign it! Please don't work on other courses (or anything else!) during class time. If you work on anything other than our course during the class period, you will receive an absence for that day.

End

It's not over until it's over. Please do not begin to pack your books until the class is concluded.

Course Outline

26 August **Welcome to the Course**

INTRODUCTION

28 August **The Foundations of the Study of Buddhism**

Read:

Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, 1-6.

Muesse, *The Age of the Sages*, 49-65.

31 August **Samsara and Liberation**

Read:

Muesse, *The Age of the Sages*, 67-95.

THE HISTORY OF ANCIENT BUDDHISM: BUDDHA, DHAMMA, SANGHA

2 September **The Historical Buddha**

Read:

Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, 7-16.

[“Oldest Buddhist Shrine Uncovered In Nepal May Push Back the Buddha's Birth Date”](#)

4 September **Buddhas and the Buddha**

Read:

Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, 16-34.

5 September **Optional Engagement**

9:00 AM-4:00 PM Day of Mindfulness Meditation Retreat

[Tennessee Buddhist Vihara](#)

4901 Ross Road

Memphis, TN 38141

- 7 September **Labor Day**
- 9 September **Buddhas and the Buddha**
View:
 The Buddha: The Story of Siddhartha, 120 minutes (available on Moodle, [YouTube](#) and [PBS](#)).
- 11 September **Sources of the Buddhist Tradition**
Read:
 Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, 35-58.
- 14 September **Buddhist Epistemology**
Read:
 Wallis, *Basic Teachings of the Buddha*, 3-4, 71-73; 5-8, 74-78; 9-21, 79-91.
- 16 September **Buddhist Epistemology**
Read:
 Wallis, *Basic Teachings of the Buddha*, 22-26, 92-96; 27, 97-99; 28-30, 100-103.
- 18 September **The Noble Facts of Life**
Read:
 Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, 59-74.
 Wallis, *Basic Teachings of the Buddha*, 36-39, 111-127.
- 21 September **The Noble Facts of Life**
Read:
 Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, 74-84.
 Wallis, *Basic Teachings of the Buddha*, 36-39, 111-127.
- 23 September **The Noble Facts of Life**
Read:
 Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, 74-84.
 Wallis, *Basic Teachings of the Buddha*, 36-39, 111-127.
- 24 September ESSAY ONE DUE
- 25 September **Monastics and Householders: The Buddhist Community**
Read:
 Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, 85-111.
View:
 Footprint of the Buddha
- 26 September **Optional Field Trip: Ganesha Nimajjan**
[India Cultural Center and Temple](#)
12005 Hwy 64
Eads, TN 38028

FOUNDATIONAL PRACTICES AND THEORIES

- 28 September **Buddhist Practice**
 Read:
 Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, 163-174.
 “Right View,” “Right Intention,” “Right Speech, Right Action,
 Right Livelihood,” “Right Effort,” in [Bodhi, *The Noble Eightfold Path: Way to the End of Suffering*](#). Seattle: BPS Pariyatti Editions,
 1994.
- 30 September **Cultivating the Mind**
 Read:
 Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, 174-201.
 Wallis, *Basic Teachings of the Buddha*, 49-56, 150-162;
- 2 October **Cultivating the Mind**
 View:
 Muesse, “Mindlessness: The Default Setting”; “Mindfulness: The
 Power of Awareness”; “Expectations: Relinquishing
 Preconceptions”; “Preparation: Taking Moral Inventory” from
Practicing Mindfulness: An Introduction to Meditation
- 5 October **Cultivating the Mind**
 View:
 Muesse, “Position: Where to Be for Meditation”; “Breathing:
 Finding a Focus for Attention”; “Problems: Stepping-Stones to
 Mindfulness”; “Mind: Working with Thoughts” from *Practicing
 Mindfulness: An Introduction to Meditation*
- 7 October **Cultivating the Mind**
 Read:
 Wallis, *Basic Teachings of the Buddha*, 57-67, 163-170.
- 9 October **World-Systems: The Buddhist Worldview**
 Read:
 Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, 112-132.
- 12 October **Foundations of Buddhist Philosophy: No-Self**
 Read:
 Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, 133-149.
 Wallis, *Basic Teachings of the Buddha*, 31-33, 104-107; 34-35, 108-
 110.

14 October **Foundations of Buddhist Philosophy: Interdependent Arising**
 Read:
 Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, 149-162.
 Wallis, *Basic Teachings of the Buddha*, 40-44; 128-135.

16 October **Midterm Examination**

19 October **Fall Break**

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE BUDDHIST TRADITIONS

21 October **The Advanced Dhamma**
 Read:
 Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, pp. 202-223.

23 October **The Rise of the Mahayana**
 Read:
 Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, pp. 224-252.

26 October **Emptiness**
 Read:
 Hanh, *The Heart of Understanding: Commentaries on the Prajnaparamita Heart Sutra* (entire).

28 October **The Way to Compassion**
 Read:
 Shantideva, *The Way of the Bodhisattva: A Translation of the Bodhicharyavatara*, 1-24; 175-181; 31-46.

30 October **The Way to Compassion**
 Read:
 Shantideva, *The Way of the Bodhisattva: A Translation of the Bodhicharyavatara*, 47-108.

2 November **The Way to Compassion**
 Read:
 Shantideva, *The Way of the Bodhisattva: A Translation of the Bodhicharyavatara*, 109-171.

4 November **The Development of the Traditions**
 Read:
 Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, pp. 253-276.

5 November **ESSAY TWO DUE**

- 6 November **Introduction to Zen**
View:
 Land of the Disappearing Buddha
- 7 November **Optional Engagement**
[India Fest](#)
Agricenter
7777 Walnut Grove Road
- 9 November **Zen**
Read:
 Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, 1-89.
- 11 November **Zen**
Read:
 Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, 90-179.
- 13 November **Zen**
Read:
 Reps, *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*, 15-107.
- 16 November **Zen**
Read:
 Reps, *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*, 109-161; 163-187.
- 18 November **Zen: Wabi-Sabi**
Read:
 Koren, *Wabi Sabi for Artists, Designers, Poets, and Philosophers*
(entire).
- 20 November **Foundations of Vajrayana**
Read:
 Powers, "Tibetan Religious History," 119-157.
View:
 Kundun
- 23 November **ESSAY THREE DUE**
- 25 November **Thanksgiving**
- 27 November **Thanksgiving**
- 30 November **Foundations of Vajrayana**
Read:
 Powers, "Tantra," 219-256.

2 December	Foundations of Vajrayana Read: Powers, "Tantra," 256-282.
4 December	Foundations of Vajrayana Read: Powers, "Death and Dying in Tibetan Buddhism," 283-310. View: <i>The Tibetan Book of the Dead, Pt. 2</i>
7 December	Buddhism for the Modern World Read: Loy, <i>The Great Awakening</i> , 1-40 (end of first paragraph).
9 December	Buddhism for the Modern World Read: Loy, <i>The Great Awakening</i> , 53-89.
16 December 1:00 PM	Final Examination

How I Grade Essays

Writing and critical thinking are, I believe, the most important parts of a liberal arts education. I therefore take essay writing very seriously and make it a significant part of your final grade. In grading students' essays, I take care to mark them as accurately and as painstakingly as possible. My own experience tells me that one's writing cannot improve unless mistakes are clearly pointed out. Learning to write well is hard work and takes much practice. In this sense, we are all beginners.

To help you in your writing practice for this course, I have outlined below the general principles I use in assessing grades for essays. I readily admit that grading essays--especially papers in the humanities--involves subjective judgments, particularly in the area of content. Ultimately, the grade you receive is the consequence of a judgment part objective and reasonable, part intuitive and aesthetic. In general, I try not to evaluate the particular position or point of view you express; rather, I look at how well you have argued that position, how fully and sympathetically you have considered alternative views, how logical and coherent your point of view is. In the final analysis, I am not really interested in whether or not you believe in God, for example, but I am very interested in *why* you believe or do not believe.

A--The A paper is, above all, interesting and effectively written. It demonstrates knowledge of the subject and evidences much thought about it. It is clearly structured and has a carefully argued thesis. The A paper is outstanding in all respects: it is devoid of any mechanical, grammatical, or typographical mistakes. Formal errors will reduce a paper's grade, regardless of content.

B--The B paper is missing some element that distinguishes the A essay. Perhaps the paper demonstrates sufficient knowledge and thought, but the presentation is pedestrian. Perhaps the content is thoughtful and interesting, but the essay suffers from mechanical or typographical mistakes.

C--The C paper fulfills the terms of the assignment without distinction.

D--The D paper is uninteresting, lacking in comprehension, and flawed by mechanical errors.

F--The F paper is without merit. It is flagrantly lacking in insight and comprehension, and appears insufficiently acquainted with academic standards for written work.

Some Hints for Better Writing

I expect proper form for papers in the humanities. Textual references should be placed in footnotes.

It is okay to use the first person.

Do not use the passive voice unless it is absolutely necessary.

Use inclusive language: that is, do not use “man” or “mankind” as the generic term for all of humanity (humankind, humans).

Create an interesting title.

Use “that” and “which” appropriately. (“Which” generally follows a comma.) Use “who” when you are talking about a human being.

If a quotation is more than three lines long, it should be indented and single-spaced, omitting the quotation marks.

Avoid vague abstractions like “the Church.” Specify exactly what you mean.

Number the pages.

Do not use the word “feel” as a substitute for “think.”

Try to avoid inappropriate use of slang (e.g., “It really sucked to be a slave in Egypt.”)

Avoid clichés like the plague.

Please do not use “relatable.”

Quote the dictionary only if absolutely demanded by the context. Ordinarily, Webster is not an authority in this course. Never begin an essay with “According to Webster’s Dictionary....”

Always edit. I rarely receive a paper that cannot be improved by eliminating verbiage.

Always keep a copy of your paper.

Please staple the paper in the upper left corner.

When you receive your graded paper, read it carefully. I spend much time and energy grading these essays and usually provide detailed commentary. You will not profit by our efforts--yours and mine--unless you review the graded essay. Always feel free to talk to me about the paper, both before and after it is graded. If you do not understand why the paper receives the grade it does, then we should talk. The essay is only part of what I hope is a semester-long dialogue.

If you are serious about improving your writing skills, you may wish to consult:

Ronald Walters and T.H. Kern, "[How to Eschew Weasel Words](#)"

William Strunk, Jr. and E. B. White, *The Elements of Style*, 3rd edition, New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1979.

Natalie Goldberg, *Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within*, Boston: Shambhala, 1986.

Grades for Class Participation

"A" Range:

- Consistently demonstrates mastery of content and context of readings through careful preparation and analysis.
- Connects daily readings to recurring themes of the course by contrasting and comparing them with past readings; makes and adequately defends judgments about texts and ideas; consistently raises questions and highlights issues of importance connected to the readings.
- Initiates discussion; listens respectfully to the ideas and opinions of others and responds in a way that benefits the discussion rather than dominates it.
- Always arrives on time for class.

"B" Range

- Frequently demonstrates attention to content and context of readings by raising good questions about texts and ideas.
- Shows improvement over the semester in understanding texts and their significance and connecting daily assignments to past readings; makes and adequately defends judgments about texts and ideas; often raises questions and highlights issues of importance connected to the readings.
- Listens respectfully to the ideas and opinions of others and responds in a way that benefits the discussion rather than dominates it.

“C” Range

- Does not always complete assigned readings prior to class; is unable or unwilling to engage in discussions and/or respond to questions or raise questions related to the readings.
- Makes connections between texts rarely and with difficulty; makes judgments about texts and ideas based solely on opinion or feeling; demonstrates little grasp of the overall significance of the readings and makes little effort to investigate further their significance.
- Waits for others to initiate discussion and usually speaks only when called upon.

“D” Range

- Is minimally prepared for class, having only scanned the reading assignments if at all; consistently fails to bring assigned materials to class and shows no sign of engagement with the texts prior to class.
- Makes indefensible connections between reading and/or judgments about the readings that are free from thoughtful analysis; is uninterested in the significance of the readings apart from passing the course.
- Is passive in class; shows little respect or interest in the points raised by peers and the professor.
- Forgets to turn off cell phone before class.
- Whispers or writes notes to other students during class

Learn and Live: Some Thoughts about Teaching

Teachers open the door, but you must enter by yourself.

Chinese Proverb

Teaching is an act of faith. I have long given up the expectation that I will see and enjoy immediate results in my teaching. The things I really want students to know—how to live well, how to be and do good, how to think about the wonders of the world and the mysteries of being alive—are not things that can be measured by tests, grades, or evaluations. I can only hope that my influence will someday have a salutary effect in their lives and that consequently I will contribute modestly to making the world a better place.

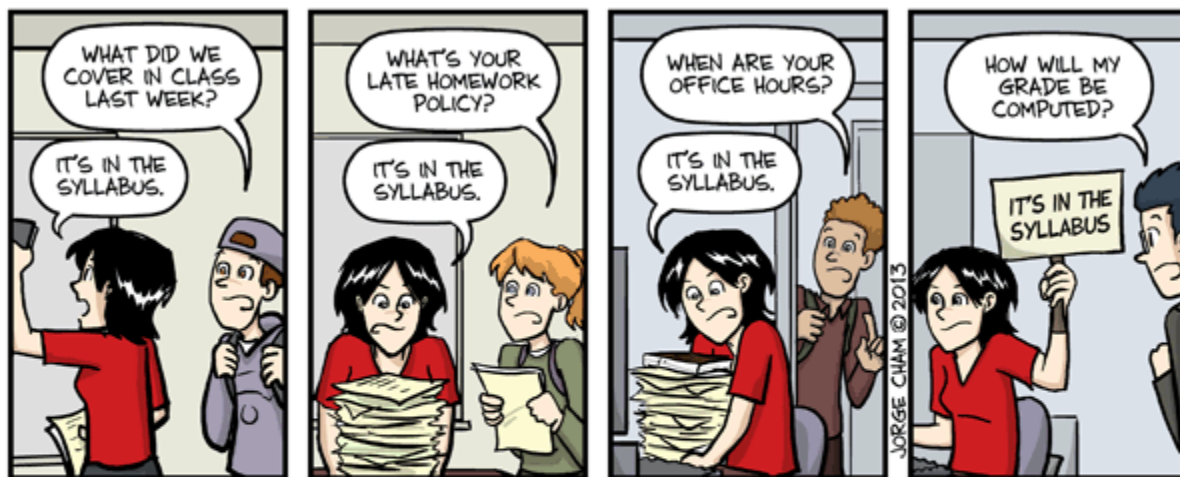
Accepting that the real value of my teaching is manifested in the future has transformed my way of thinking about what I teach and how I teach it. Five years—maybe five weeks!—after my course, most students will have little recollection of the material we studied. But they will remember me. For better or worse, the way I comport myself, treat others, and approach the business of learning is what makes an indelible impression. The Hasidic tradition of Judaism relates the story of Leib Saras who returned from a visit to his rabbi and was asked by family and friends what words of Torah he learned. Leib Saras replied, “I did not go to my teacher to hear his words of Torah; I went to see how he ties his shoelaces.” I am very much aware that many of my students are there to see my shoelaces, and those who aren’t, observe them anyway.

What I want my students to see in me is a real individual who aspires never to stop learning, a person who struggles to understand the world and to live a life of genuineness and sincerity, one who often falls short of that aspiration and gets discouraged, and yet tries again. It is more important to me that they regard me as a master of learning than as a master of a subject. As teacher, my goal is to be the best student in the classroom. I want students to learn from me how to learn, how to teach themselves, and to see the value of never giving up the spirit of inquiry and curiosity.

Foremost among my pedagogical aspirations is humility, but I confess this is more an ideal than a reality. I have come to prize humility as the greatest of virtues, but I lament how far away from me it often is. Humility is imperative to the work of learning, and hence of teaching. The students I have found to be the hardest to teach are those who lack humility; it is difficult to inspire someone who thinks he or she already knows. Seeking to be humble as a teacher means recognizing my own limitations both as student (there are still so many things I do not know and never will) and about how best to encourage and inspire others to learn. Being humble means striving to keep learning how to teach.

I have also come to embrace the virtue of risk and its companion courage, although, again, I make no special claims to having attained either. I have learned that becoming a better teacher means risking innovation, trying out new approaches and new ideas. Taking pedagogical risks has to be done with courage, because it is quite possible to fail.

But I'm consoled by the words of one worthy philosopher: "You can ultimately succeed only at unimportant things. The loftiest things in life often end in failure." Because learning and teaching are among the most important things in life, it is inevitable that we will sometimes fail at them. The best teachers, I believe, make that moment the occasion for another lesson.



IT'S IN THE SYLLABUS

This message brought to you by every instructor that ever lived.

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