

# The Buddhist Tradition

Phil 510, section 1

Syllabus

Meeting: Tu/Th 2:10-3:25 PM  
Humanities 386

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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 3:30-5:30 PM

Thursdays, 3:30-4:30 PM

(sign-up sheet outside my office)

## **Course Description:**

This course is designed to introduce students to some of the major systems of Buddhist thought. We will look at the philosophical worldview implicit in the earliest known Buddhist sutras, examine the later shift to Mahayana Buddhism in India, investigate the Chinese transformation of Buddhism, and conclude with a close look at Chan (Zen) thought. Although the course is meant primarily as an introductory survey of important Buddhist thinkers, each year we focus our reading and discussion on a particular theme that runs through the many works. This year we will be concentrating on the various ways in which Buddhists believed that knowledge of ultimate truth empowers us to overcome obstacles and attachments. That is, we will focus on Buddhist understanding of the relationship between enlightenment and self-liberation.

## **Goals and prerequisites:**

This course has two basic goals. First, as an upper level course in philosophy, it aims to cultivate our capacities for thinking in a clear and systematic way about difficult problems that are fundamental to life. Second, as a course devoted to the Buddhist classics, it aims to make us more literate in a discourse that strikes many modern readers as mysterious or even impenetrable. If you are not prepared to spend a great deal of time puzzling over difficult passages of ancient philosophical texts, you will have a very hard time fulfilling the requirements of the course. All foreign language texts are in translation, and the reading assignments are shortened to allow you the time to scrutinize them carefully. At least one prior course in philosophy is required.

## **Assignments and Grading:**

Written assignments include a midterm paper (due in stages on March 20, April 1, and April 4), several short response paragraphs (due on *every* day of class, except when this syllabus specifies otherwise) and a take-home final exam (May 20).

The midterm paper will focus on our readings and discussions of Indian Buddhist thought. It should be typed, double-spaced, and five to six pages in length. As for the reading responses, each should be a brief (half page), carefully formulated argument about a portion of the readings that are assigned for that day. These responses are not to be stream-of-consciousness thoughts about whatever happens to be on your mind, but should be devoted to understanding the assigned texts. Their purpose is to help you organize your thoughts for class discussion, but on several unannounced days I will collect them for grading as well. The final will be a take-home exam and it will be comprehensive in nature; you are responsible for all of the readings, assignments, and class discussions prior to the exam. Both the midterm paper and the final exam will consist of essay-style answers to questions on the readings, and several possible questions will be provided well before these assignments are due.

The midterm paper will be completed in stages, with printed copies being due at the beginning of class on March 20, April 1, and April 4. Anyone who is late to complete any of the work for these stages will be penalized by one gradation per day from the final paper grade. For example, a “B” paper would be reduced to a “B-” if one day late and to a “C+” if two days late. The same policy applies to the take-home exam. Late response paragraphs will not be accepted. Therefore it is highly recommended that you attend every class with a response paragraph in hand. Exceptions to these late work policies will be made for verified emergencies.

The final grade for the course will be computed by averaging the grades on the midterm paper, final exam, and response paragraphs. These will be weighted as follows:

Midterm paper:	1/3 <sup>rd</sup>
Final exam:	1/3 <sup>rd</sup>
Response paragraphs (averaged, lowest two grades will be dropped):	1/3 <sup>rd</sup>

**Required Texts:**

John J. Holder, ed., *Early Buddhist Discourses* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006). (Hereafter “Holder.”)

Christopher W. Gowans, *Philosophy of the Buddha* (New York: Routledge, 2003). (Hereafter “Gowans.”)

Hakeda, Yoshito, *The Awakening of Faith* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006). (Hereafter “Yoshito.”)

Supplementary essays available for download on *iLearn*.

**Class Schedule:**

- 24 Jan. Introduction  
**Response paragraph not required**

## Early Buddhist Sutras (Suttas)

- 29 Jan. The life of the Buddha (Gowans 17-27 and Holder 1-18)
- 31 Jan. Overview of the Buddha's teachings (Holder xiii-xx, 19-25, 73-79, 95-100)
- 5 Feb. The doctrine of "no self" (Holder 26-41, 80-88)
- 7 Feb. The destruction of craving (Holder 59-72, 101-116)
- 12 Feb. Mindfulness (Holder 42-58)

## Early Buddhist Philosophy

- 14 Feb. The teachings of the Buddha (Gowans 41-60)  
**Response paragraph not required**
- 19 Feb. Gowans' interpretation of the "no self" doctrine (Gowans 63-90)
- 21 Feb. Gowans' interpretation of the "no self" doctrine (Gowans 91-116)
- 26 Feb. Nirvana (Nibbāna) and the cessation of suffering (Gowans 127-157)

## Mahāyāna Buddhism in India

- 28 Feb. Introduction to Mahāyāna (Siderits, "The Rise of Mahāyāna," and selections from Thurman, *The Holy Teaching*, both on *iLearn*).
- 4 Mar. Conference—no class
- 6 Mar. Emptiness (Selections from Thurman, *The Holy Teaching*, and from Garfield, "Introduction," both on *iLearn*)
- 11 Mar. Nāgārjuna on the Buddha and Nirvāna (Garfield, *Wisdom of the Middle Way* Chapters XXII and XXV, on *iLearn*)
- 13 Mar. Nāgārjuna on the emptiness of the self (Garfield, *Wisdom of the Middle Way* Chapters IX and XVIII, on *iLearn*)
- 18 Mar. Nāgārjuna in dialogue with other Mahāyāna thinkers (Siderits, "Madhyamaka: The Doctrine of Emptiness," on *iLearn*)

- 20 Mar. Discussion of mid-term papers: thesis statement and introduction  
**Midterm paper: thesis statement and introductory paragraph due**  
**Response paragraph not required**
- 25 Mar. Spring recess—no class
- 27 Mar. Spring recess—no class
- 1 Apr. Discussion of mid-term papers: rough draft  
**Midterm paper: rough draft due (5 page minimum)**  
**Response paragraph not required**

## Mahāyāna Buddhism in China

- 3 Apr. Introduction to the Tathāgatagarbha (Buddha-embryo) doctrine (Harvey, “Mahāyāna Philosophy,” on *iLearn*)  
**Response paragraph not required**
- 4 Apr. (Friday) **Midterm paper: final draft due by noon (5-6 pages)**
- 8 Apr. Introduction to *The Awakening of Faith* (Hakeda 31-43)
- 10 Apr. Enlightenment (Hakeda 43-57)
- 15 Apr. Samsāra and Nirvāna (Hakeda 57-73)
- 17 Apr. Attachments (Hakeda 73-87)
- 22 Apr. Faith and practice (Hakeda 88-97)

## Chan (Zen) Buddhism

- 24 Apr. Introduction to Chan Buddhism (“Selections” on *iLearn*)
- 29 Apr. The Heart Sutra (Hanh, *The Heart of Understanding*, on *iLearn*)
- 1 May. Chan on practice (Ivanhoe, “Translation and Commentary on the *Platform Sutra*,” on *iLearn*)
- 6 May. Chan on wisdom (Yampolsky, *Platform Sutra*, on *iLearn*)
- 8 May. Chan on knowledge and liberation (Liu, “The Chan School,” on *iLearn*)
- 13 May. Chan personhood (Kasulis, “Zen Action / Zen Person,” on *iLearn*)

15. May. Review for final exam  
**Response paragraph not required**

20 May. **Take-home exam** due by noon