

Buddhism and the Environment: Relg 353¹

This class is an investigation of Buddhist images, symbols, stories, doctrines, ethics, and practices as they relate to understanding the environment and humanity's role in relation to it. We will examine classical texts as well as modern commentaries. We will consider classic principles evoked by Buddhist teachers, writers, and activists as they address environmental issues, and we will examine how those principles take new forms.

Further, this class will invite you to reflect deeply on your own experience of the world and its environmental challenges and your own relationship with the environment.

In keeping with the purpose of the College of Arts and Sciences, we will emphasize "training in personal initiative, in social consciousness, in aesthetic perception, [and] in intellectual curiosity and integrity." (We will also emphasize empathy as a necessary approach for learning about people in cultures as radically different from one's own as Buddhist culture is likely to be to most who take this class!)

Know ye the grasses and the trees . . . Then know ye the worms, and the moths, and the different sorts of ants . . . Know ye also the four-footed animals small and great, the serpents, the fish which range in the water, the birds that are borne along on wings and move through the air . . . Know ye the marks that constitute species are theirs, and their species are manifold.

Sutta-Nipata (early Buddhist text)

Texts:

Course packet

M.T. Anderson, *Feed* (available also on reserve at the library)

Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught* (on reserve, too: BQ4132 R3313 1974)

Stephanie Kaza and Kenneth Kraft, *Dharma Rain: Sources of Buddhist Environmentalism*

Jane Holtz Kay, *Asphalt Nation: How the Automobile Took Over America and How We Can Take It Back*

Barbara Gates, *Already Home: A Topography of Spirit and Place*

Notable websites: www.greensangha.org (415 459-8610) Green Sangha: Spiritually Based Environmental Activism

¹ Printed on 30% postconsumer waste recycled paper--that's what we use in our copy machines. Sewanee pays more money to be a bit more environmentally responsive in this regard. Is it paper that has the highest postconsumer waste percentage? No, but it's the best that will work without damaging the machines and causing mechanical difficulties.

Requirements:

Attendance	assumed and required
Three Essays [the first two must be 5-7 pages. Paper #1 is worth 15% of your grade; paper #2 is worth 20% of your grade, and the final paper must be 8-10 pages and is worth 25% of your grade (all papers: Times Roman font 12 point, 1-inch margins)]	60%
Journal	20%
Fieldtrip to Buddhist temple and journal entries thereon (no grade, just you get the percentage or not)	5%
Participation (Please know that your participation grade begins as the grade you have earned on short papers, essays, and the journal--thus if the average of those grades is a "B," then a "B" is what you start with as a participation grade--your participation grade then goes up or down according to your performance in class. Thus you do not simply get an "A" in participation because you attended class.)	15%

Journal:

Your journal is an essential aspect of your experience of this course. It will help you make this course a vital part of your learning time at Sewanee. Writing intensive; reflection and thinking intensive; informal writing. A large part of your grade will depend on journal entries, and a large part of that grade will be determined simply by length of the journal. In short--it is understood in this class that a *good* journal is a *long* journal. Why? Because journal-writing is thinking, and just as a photographer takes thirty pictures for each one that is excellent, you will write many many pages of your thoughts for each thought that is excellent. Pay close attention to handouts on journal-writing; reread them every week or so. Spend a lot of time on your journal. Begin tonight with an informal reflection on what we did in class today or on your reading after you've done it for Wednesday. Begin your PCE (see below). Do a lot of things in your journal. All your journal work will contribute to your writing of the papers for the class. *Write the date at the top of each journal entry. (Absolutely required!)* You may also want to note where you are when you write it--especially if you're with your plant companion (see below).

Two important aspects of the journal: your Plant Companionship Experiment (PCE) and the Course Experiments (CE's).

Plant Companionship Experiment (PCE) (with thanks to Roger Gottlieb and Laura Hobsgood-Oster!): Over the course of the semester you will spend time (at least one hour each week) with a plant. Sit with your selected plant companion and then reflect on this experience in your journal. *Begin the journal with reflections on why you chose that particular plant.* Work then to name the species of the plant, describe the general characteristics of the species, and indicate if the plant is a native species to the Cumberland Plateau (where we are here). (Having difficulties? We have a lot of forestry and biology majors who can help. The University also has a forester and an assistant forester and at least one botanist. Who can you call to help you? Call him/her/them! Don't hesitate--this is a learning place and we all must depend on each other to learn.) If you can, include a history (brief) of the species and the particular plant that would be an interesting entrance into the project. For example, suppose you select a large tree and learn that it is one of our white oaks. You might determine the age of the tree -- which may indicate if the tree was on the land before the campus grew around it or if the tree was planted by people on the campus. You will probably want to explore (if it's possible) the history of that particular plant... (For example, Sewanee has recently planted two very large trees in front of McClurg (near University Avenue) at great expense. You will find the history of these trees quite interesting--who paid for the moving of these great trees? What risks are incurred to the trees by moving them when they're already established? What happened to the crater caused when the tree was uprooted to be moved? For these kinds of questions about specific trees, you might want to do contact our assistant forester Joe Burckle, or Prof. Martin Knoll (who has been here and has been noticing the trees for a while), or Physical Plant Services. We will discuss the project at various points throughout the semester. Possible journal entries for your PCE: drawing the plant, writing a letter to the plant, introducing your plant to a friend of yours...

Course Experiments (CE's): You will choose to engage in **at least FOUR** of the six possible experiments designed to help you imagine all the more how Buddhists are inclined to experience and consider things. (They are described in the syllabus below.) In short, you will be invited to engage in experiments that develop empathy. To get the most from these experiments, you will reflect upon them at length in your journal. What kind of experiments? Our fieldtrip on October 1st is a good example: we will go to a Buddhist temple in Nashville and meditate with a group that regularly meets there. (Don't worry--the type of meditation you will do is often used by anyone seeking to learn about contemplation, be they not at all religious or be they Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, or whatever.) For the following three weeks you will be expected to meditate for 20 minutes three times a week (don't worry--you can do it with your plant and so get PCE and CE time simultaneously!) and write about those experiments in your journal. Indeed, these experiments should receive considerable attention in your journal. You will be able to relate the experiments to the readings we are doing at the time and the readings before then. Reflecting on these experiments and how they change your view of the world will help you understand Buddhism and the environment better.

- Attendance and participation are extremely important; students are expected to help make the class interesting, relevant, and thorough by participating in class discussions. After the first **two** absences students will be placed on cut warning.
- "Generosity should never produce or encourage sloth, depravity, insensitivity, irresponsibility or meanness" (Master Hsing Yun) thus I do not generally allow students to take my classes pass/fail.
- Please complete each reading assignment prior to the class period on which it will be discussed. Any homework is due at the beginning of the class. Assignments must be turned in on time unless you receive prior approval. (Please ask me, at the latest, the day before the assignment is due.) Please remember that pop quizzes assist in the development of discipline. (Know, incidentally, that I have tried to balance reading learning with experiment-and-journal-writing learning. If I find students are imbalanced or overwhelmed by the work we're doing, we'll work to solve the problem, changing assignments as necessary.)
- Please do not expect the opportunity to turn in papers late. Such opportunities are generous gifts indeed and should be requested as such.
- Passing the course requires completing all the assigned work.
- We all enjoy a unique community here and a unique opportunity to develop our character by refraining from lying, cheating, and stealing and, rather, cultivating habits of truth-telling, aiding others legitimately and appropriately, and giving of ourselves generously. In terms of your academic work in this class, this means that I will sometimes encourage students to work together and at other times working together will be prohibited. It will be important to recognize the difference! When you use ideas or words from any article, book, or paper, cite the source in a footnote. Please pledge all work. It is a pleasure and, yes, an honor, to uphold the honor code here at Sewanee. Plagiarism or academic dishonesty cases will be turned over to the Honor Council.
- You are responsible for obtaining any information which was missed because you were absent or late; the best way to go about this is first to approach a conscientious student and ask for assistance.
- A note on proselytization (proselytize: to induce someone to convert to one's faith; to recruit someone to join one's party, institution, or cause): In case you're worried, please be assured that I do *not* want anyone in this class who is not Buddhist to become Buddhist. (There are many reasons for this--we can talk sometime about it.) Just as your organic chemistry professor wants you to become interested in and enthusiastic about learning about organic chemistry, I want you to become interested in and enthusiastic about learning about Buddhism and the environment. (To be *quite* honest, I probably *am* guilty of proselytization about the *environment*--I do want you to be sensitive and responsive to issues related to the environment. But then you probably are already since you've chosen to take this particular class.)

- Please come speak with me about any difficulties you have with the class as soon as you recognize the difficulties. If, for example, you are anxious about speaking in class, please come talk with me and we can work out a way to minimize your anxiety while allowing you to participate. If you have a learning disability or suspect you have one and would like some accommodations made, please come talk with me. If you feel that your work has been graded unfairly, please come talk with me. If you feel class discussion has been handled indelicately, please come talk with me. While such a discussion might initially seem futile, solid communication between student and professor often alleviates stress in students and makes clear to me what problems students are having so that I can work to solve them. While not true in *every* case, most students who come to speak with me about their difficulties in the class leave my office more satisfied, at peace, and able to pursue the work in the class with greater ease and more reward.

- 29 Aug Introduction to the class
- 1 Sep No class. Rather, convocation.
- 3 Sep Anderson's *Feed* 1-121 (Because this book is fun to read and interesting and compelling, some of you will want to read ahead, to finish the book early. DON'T!!!! You will neither enjoy nor benefit as much from the class discussion and from the book if you read ahead.) Please take notes as you read and read always with these questions in mind: the author is describing a DYSTOPIA, an unpleasant world of the future that he imagines is one that naturally comes about due to how we live in the world today.
- * *What exactly is happening in the novel? What's the plot? Who are the important characters?*
 - * *What are the unpleasantnesses of this world of the future?*
 - * *What are the features/problems of today's world that the author seems to think will bring about this world of the future?*
- Please come to class with these things:
- 1) a **list** of page numbers of parts of the reading you found most interesting or that you think might help you as you consider this book and brief topic descriptions for each. (This is a journal entry.) Examples:
 - “p. 4 first mention of “feeds”, these seem to be...” or
 - “p. 39 history of feeds, as far as the narrator knows” or
 - “p. X, I really like it when this narrator talks about...”
 - 2) at least one **reflection pondering the above italicized questions** (This is a journal entry.)
 - 3) your first journal entry related to the PCE. (This is another journal entry.)
- 8 Sep *Feed* 122-235 [**Please continue the assignments above for the rest of the book**--write as many journal entries as you like and don't forget your PCE, at least one hour a week with your plant and reflect on that in your journal.]
- 10 Sep Handouts on the Buddha's life [Remember: three journal entries a week is a minimum--what will you write your journal entries on for these readings? and keep up with your PCE and journal entries on that. Also: I will give you a handout to help you write journal entries related to your own eco-autobiography.]
- 15 Sep Basic Buddhist Concepts: dukkha, tanha.
Rahula's *What the Buddha Taught* 1-34 [It's a *dry* book--what notes can you take to ensure you understand the material? what writing will help you enliven the material? what questions do you have? --all of these are good journal possibilities.]
- 17 Sep Basic Buddhist Concepts: nirodha, magga, anatta
Rahula 35-66
[Wondering what to write in your journal? if you'd like to, respond to this quotation: “Shopping is a core activity in sustaining a culture of denial” --Judith Simmer-Brown, Buddhist and professor of Buddhist Studies.]
- 18 Sep, Thursday--night showing of *The Footprints of the Buddha*, basement of duPont library, 8 p.m.

[Especially recommended for those who are less familiar with Buddhism.]

22 Sep "The Fire Sermon" Rahula 95-97

Packet: Kaza's "Overcoming the Grip..."

24 Sep Packet: Loy's "The Religion of the Market"

Course Experiment #1: Restraint from buying. For one week beginning after class today, restrain from buying any material object (besides food, medicine, and supplies that are absolutely necessary to you as a student). Not in stores, not from catalogs, nor from the internet. Is someone having a birthday or other special day? What can you do or give to recognize and celebrate that without buying a material object? You want to buy that CD? Instead of buying it, reflect on how you feel NOT buying it. If you fail and end up buying things, make sure you write down exactly what you bought, how much it cost and why you bought it. Perhaps you will even want to write down what food you buy and what that food is good for. Reflect on what this experiment has to do with your study of Buddhism and the environment and the readings we've done so far. (Note: taking a candy bar from a friend and saying "I'll pay you back next week" is buying something!)

****25 Sep (Thursday night) 8 p.m. basement of Dupont Library: hour-long video: *Merchants of Cool*****

29 Sep **Draft of first paper is due** for draft workshop and discussion

1 Oct Meditation

Rahula 67-75 and 109-119 ("Foundations of Mindfulness" a Buddhist text)

Dharma Rain 332-334

TENTATIVE: FIELDTRIP TO BUDDHIST TEMPLE IN NASHVILLE FOR MEDITATION we will leave in vans in time for an evening meditation session

Course Experiment #2: Meditation. For the next three weeks, meditate for at least 20 minutes, three times a week. Keep a log in your journal that indicates the date and time that you meditated. Further, do what you can to write reflections on how that effects you and how that relates to Buddhism and the environment in your journal. You will be instructed in a variety of meditation techniques--some of which are standard for relaxation classes and the like. While with the other experiments some failure is presumed, failure is not acceptable in this experiment! Three times a week, twenty minutes each time. (Do you already regularly meditate? Perhaps you can switch to a particular kind of meditation for these three weeks--)

3 Oct (FRIDAY) by noon in my office (WE 215): PAPER #1. Please staple the draft we discussed on Monday to the back of this final paper.

[Watch for announcements about the movie *Rivers and Tides* coming to campus: extra credit opportunity.]

6 Oct Daily life and blessings

Rahula 76-89 (note especially the five precepts on page 80), 98-99, 99-105

8 Oct Ritual

Dharma Rain 439-453, 468-78

13 Oct Eating

Handout: "Power Steer"

Dharma Rain 340-352, 448-452, 465-67

15 Oct Reverence for life

Dharma Rain 9-42

20 Oct Fall break--No class.

22 Oct Nature as Teacher, Nature of Nature

Dharma Rain 43-78

Course Experiment #3: Calming the fires, reflecting on nature. For one week, avoid watching television, movies, and reading anything for mere titillation/pleasure. Avoid surfing the internet. Avoid exposing yourself to advertisements. (Shun billboards!) Instead, do things you think the Buddhist thinkers you're reading would have you do. Reflect on all the many different aspects of this experiment and how it relates to Buddhism and the environment

- in your journal. (If you fail at times and indulge in watching a tv show or something, reflect on those failures!)
- 27 Oct Contemporary interpretations
Dharma Rain 79-116
Course Experiment #4: Revering Sentient Beings. For one week, avoid eating sentient beings and make note whenever you use goods that are made of sentient beings. (While not all Buddhists are vegetarians by any means, there is certainly textual support for not eating sentient beings and there is great respect for those who don't.) Your experiment starts after class today and lasting one week: avoid eating dead sentient beings, go vegetarian. Reflect on this experiment (as always) in your journal. You may fail sometimes--reflect on that! Already vegetarian? Consider going vegan for the week! You might want to take this time to learn where soy milk is available in McClurg and trying it a few times if you don't know what it's like already!
- 29 Oct Contemporary interpretations
Dharma Rain 117-160
- 3 Nov Env'l Action as Buddhist Practice
Dharma Rain 237-52, 257-302 [Have you written at least one PCE journal entry this week?]
- 5 Nov Home Practice, Wild Practice
Dharma Rain 303-339, 393-438 ****selections?***
Course Experiment #5: The Five Precepts. Review page 80 in Rahula and view the handout I give you on the five precepts. For this week, endeavor to keep these precepts. (Most Buddhists definitely do NOT succeed in keeping them, incidentally!) Reflect on your journal. Remember that it's as important to reflect on failing to keep the precepts as it is to reflect on keeping them--
- 10 Nov **Draft of second paper is due** for draft workshop and discussion
[Look for a speaker on the Bhopal, India Union Carbide Corporation tragedy--Krishnaveni Gundu. Extra credit opportunity.]
- 12 Nov Jane Holtz Kay's *Asphalt Nation* 55-137
Course Experiment #6: Mindfulness of Moving. At the time of the writing of the Buddhist texts, of course, there was no motorized transportation. Traveling was a much different activity than it is today. To get a sense of what that was like and to consider the Buddhist concept of *paticca-samuppada* in greater depth, avoid getting into any vehicle that uses fossil fuels. No cars, no planes, no buses, no trains. What happens to your life? What does all this reveal about Buddhism and the environment? (As usual, noting failures and reflecting on them is helpful. And please make sure your personal safety is foremost--better that you should fail in this experiment one time than you put yourself at personal risk.)
- 14 Nov (FRIDAY) by noon in my office (WE 215): PAPER #2. Please staple the draft we discussed on Monday to the back of this final paper.**
- 17 Nov Jane Holtz Kay's *Asphalt Nation* 295-358
[How's your PCE coming?]
- 19 Nov Barbara Gates' *Already Home* 1-52
* *What is Barbara Gates doing in this book and how does it relate to Buddhism and the Environment?*
* *When do you see overt and covert references to Buddhism?*
Please come to class with these things:
1) a **list** of page numbers of parts of the reading you found most interesting or that you think might help you as you consider this book and brief description of topic descriptions for each. (This is a journal entry.) Examples:
"p. xvii: paticca samuppada, broadening the view, interconnectedness--I remember from Rahula!" or

“ p. xvii anicca, impermanence of the body, not-self” or

“p. 9: her view is obscured, deluded-- ‘obsessed with a self in pain’ ...world doesn’t exist, only pain. solution: run to Ca.”

2) at least one **reflection pondering the above italicized questions** (This is a journal entry.)

24 Nov No class as professor is at conference.

RESCHEDULED CLASS: (Tuesday night? Definitely before Thanksgiving)

Barbara Gates' *Already Home* 53-124

Note: the day before Thanksgiving is celebrated by many Americans as "Buy Nothing Day"-- you might want to reflect in your journal about your own experiment with restraint from buying from earlier in the semester if you chose to do that experiment.

26 Nov No class due to Thanksgiving

1 Dec Barbara Gates' *Already Home* 125-?

[How's your PCE coming?]

3 Dec Barbara Gates' *Already Home* ? -247

8 Dec Packet: "Dirt in the New Machine"

Dharma Rain 252-256

Journals due (Shouldn't be a big deal at all because you did your 3 or more entries a week and dated each one appropriately as you wrote it, yes?)

15 December Monday: **PAPER #3 due in my office (WE 215) by 5 p.m.**