

RLG206Y

BUDDHIST TRADITIONS

When real and nonreal both
Are absent from before the mind,
Nothing else remains for mind to do
But rest in perfect peace, from concepts free.

(Santideva 9.34)



Immerse yourself in the study of Buddhist traditions across the world

Buddhist religious traditions span over 2,500 years and have played an integral role in the social, cultural, and religious life of countless individuals throughout South, Southeast, and East Asia. More recently, a growing number of people have begun to explore the meaning and value of Buddhism in the contemporary Western world. This survey course provides an academic introduction to the histories, fundamental doctrines, and practices of Buddhist traditions around the world. In the process, students will be introduced to the methods and issues that characterize the contemporary academic study of religion.

In the fall semester of this course, we will focus primarily on the origins of Buddhism in India. We will also begin to observe the ways in which these traditions have been transformed by Buddhists today and to reflect upon the perspective of North American writers and practitioners on the relevance of Buddhism for contemporary Western society. The winter semester of this course will focus on Buddhist traditions of Central and East Asia and a continuing examination of the history and nature of Buddhist traditions in the West.

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introducing DISPOSITION, a role-playing game

2014-15

This year-long course will engage you in a role-playing game called DISPOSITION. You will start the year assigned a character who will make choices about how to react to events occurring in the class. In your writing assignments, you will explain and interpret those choices, based on your growing understanding of Buddhism. The class will collaboratively re-draw the University campus as a Buddhist universe replete with hidden objects that may facilitate character development. Students will work toward final projects that involve uniting skills and resources to build a temple, conduct a major ritual, or reveal a hidden land.

disposition /dɪspə'zɪʃ(ə)n/: a person's inherent qualities of mind and character; an inclination or tendency; the way in which something is placed or arranged, especially in relation to other things; the stationing of troops ready for military action; the distribution or transfer of property or money to someone, especially by bequest; the power to deal with something as one pleases; the determination of events by divine power.

Required Books

You must obtain the following books and bring them to each class meeting.

The Heart of the World: A Journey to Tibet's Lost Paradise, by Ian Baker, Penguin Books; Reprint edition (May 2, 2006)

Available at the U of T Bookstore

The Story of Buddhism: A Concise Guide to Its History & Teachings, by Donald Lopez (HarperOne, 2009)

Available at the U of T Bookstore

The Holy Teaching of Vimalakirti, translated by Robert Thurman

Buy this book yourself or read it online at http://www.imeditate.com/books_music/vimalakirti.html

The Life of Milarepa, translated by Andrew Quintman (Penguin, 2010)

Available at the U of T Bookstore

The Empty Mirror: Experiences in a Japanese Zen Monastery, by Janwillem van de Wetering

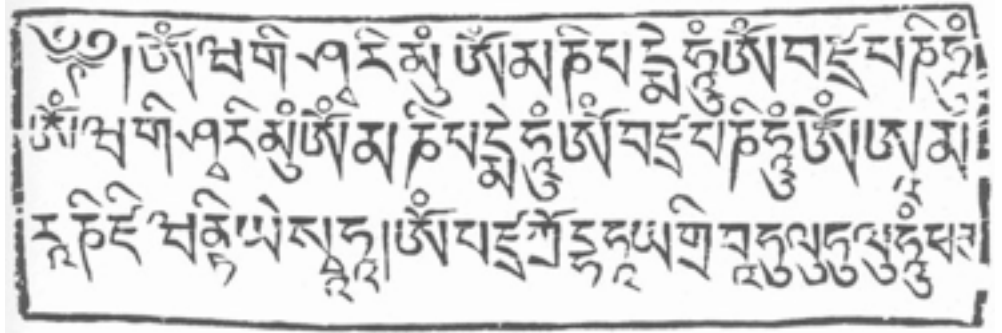
You should buy this as a Kindle book to read on your computer or other device, or order it online.

Articles to be provided.

Additional readings will be provided to the class as needed.

Other Required Supplies: a Treasury

Over the course of the year your character will be accumulating material objects that will facilitate completion of the group project. You will need to bring these objects to class each week in your Treasury. This may simply be a large envelope or a box of some kind. It will contain your character card, your rosary, and the objects you have discovered. Rare objects will have to be turned in to the instructor, but common objects will be yours to keep.



ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Participation (worth 9% of total grade)

You must attend all class meetings; if you cannot attend please email the instructor to explain. You must come to class having completed the required readings and assignments, ready to engage in discussion. There will be occasional informal writing assignments in class, regular group discussions, and other required activities - if you do not come to class, you will not be able to succeed in this course. Your engagement during each class meeting is the basis for your ability to complete all other assignments in this course.

Writing (worth 56% of total grade)

You will complete a total of 14 short writing assignments (800-1000 words) throughout the year. These will be focused on your character's development in reaction to events that occur in the game, linking these to readings and themes from class discussions. You will use the Blackboard blogging tool to publish these writings for the class to read. You will be provided topical guidelines and/or questions to address for each piece of writing to help you focus your writing. Areas to focus on include the quality of your writing (i.e., clarity, grammar, and creativity), your Disposition role-playing (i.e., how well your blog sees the world through the eyes of a Buddhist), and your research (i.e., your writing should reflect things you've learned from lectures, assigned readings, or additional research you might have done); writing will also be evaluated based on the Arts & Science policy at <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/general/grading-policy>. A grade and feedback on the first seven blog entries will be provided by November 26.

Quizzes (worth 15% of total grade)

There will be three quizzes throughout the year on key terminology and concepts in Buddhism, and on key geographic locations on a map. All possible terms, concepts, and map locations will be provided to you in advance - you simply must memorize them.

Final Project Presentation (worth 5% of total grade)

On the last day of class in the spring, you will present your project to the entire class - by yourself, if you completed the project alone, or as part of your group.

Final Project Paper (worth 15% of total grade)

You will compose a 4-5-page (single-spaced) paper by the last day of class in the spring discussing your work on the final project. Details about this paper will be provided in class.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

readings and assignments noted here should be completed by the date under which they are listed

assignment details may be adjusted as the year progresses - always check the course website for up-to-date details

Sept 9

Introduction to the class.

Sept 17

Read "Maps of Greater Tibet" (on Blackboard) and *Heart of the World*, pages 1-85. Set up your blogs on Blackboard with an introductory message.

Sept 24

Read *Heart of the World*, pages 86-189. Minor event occurs in class; writing assignment (#1) to be completed within a week.

Oct 1

Read *Heart of the World*, pages 190-315. Minor event occurs in class; writing assignment (#2) to be completed within a week. Visiting speaker from writing centre.

Oct 8

Read *Heart of the World*, pages 316-end and *Story of Buddhism*, chapter on The Universe. **Major** event occurs in class; writing assignment (#3) to be completed within a week.

Oct 15

Read *Story of Buddhism*, chapter on The Buddha. Minor event occurs in class; writing assignment (#4) to be completed within a week.

Oct 22

Read *Story of Buddhism*, chapter on The Dharma. Minor event occurs in class; writing assignment (#5) to be completed within a week.

Oct 29

Quiz No 1 and guest speaker.

Nov 5

Read *Story of Buddhism*, chapter on The Universe. Minor event occurs in class; writing assignment (#6) to be completed within a week.

Nov 12

Read *Story of Buddhism*, chapter on Lay Practice. **Major** event occurs in class; writing assignment (#7) to be completed within a week.

Nov 19

Library research session.

Nov 26

Quiz No 2. You will receive a grade and feedback on your first set of writing assignments by today.

- Winter Break -

Jan 7

Read *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakirti*, pages TBA. Minor event occurs in class; writing assignment (#8) to be completed within a week.

Jan 14

Read *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakirti*, pages TBA. Minor event occurs in class; writing assignment (#9) to be completed within a week.

Jan 21

Read *The Life of Milarepa*, pages TBA. **Major** event occurs in class; writing assignment (#10) to be completed within a week.

Jan 28

Read *The Life of Milarepa*, pages TBA. Minor event occurs in class; writing assignment (#11) to be completed within a week.

Feb 4

Read *The Life of Milarepa*, pages TBA. Minor event occurs in class; writing assignment (#12) to be completed within a week.

Feb 18 - NO CLASS

READING WEEK

Feb 25

Read *The Empty Mirror*, pages TBA. Minor event occurs in class; writing assignment (#13) to be completed within a week.

Mar 4

Read *The Empty Mirror*, pages TBA. Minor event occurs in class; writing assignment (#14) to be completed within a week.

Mar 11

Project research & development.

Mar 18

Project research & development.

Mar 25

Quiz No 3.

Apr 1 - LAST CLASS

Presentations in class. Final papers due.

DISPOSITION: OVERVIEW

Disposition is a role-playing game in which all members of the class play the role of a Buddhist character who they will develop throughout the year through a combination of reflections on readings, individual research, and events that affect both individuals and the entire community (i.e., the class). These characters will grow in the course of activities such as short writing assignments, in-class interactions with other students, and a final paper, all of which should reflect how the events characters experience and the choices they make might be seen through Buddhist eyes. During the second class meeting, everyone will be given a character sheet that identifies their primary skill and has empty spaces to be filled in with skill points in class on particular dates (see page 3 for the schedule). On those dates, everyone will assign one point to their primary skill and one to any other skill that they choose. These skills will allow your character to create things like wealth or food and to contribute their abilities to larger group projects, such as building a temple. Your choices should reflect the type of character you want to craft - for instance, someone whose primary skill is farming might decide to play the role of a devout farmer who donates food and wealth to Buddhist adepts and craftspeople. Or, he or she could spend time developing knowledge of ritual or medicine. You should try to find a combination of skills that creates a character that is both interesting to you, as you will be writing from their perspective, and useful to your community.

Creating the space

During the second class meeting we will remap the University campus as a Buddhist universe. This is where the game will take place.

Characters

There are three main character types in Disposition:

1. Craftspeople, who excel in art, building, and trade.
2. Buddhist adepts, who are skilled at scholarship, ritual, and medicine.
3. Producers, who are excellent at farming, trade, and medicine.

You will be assigned a character with a primary skill that you cannot change, but you are free to develop your secondary skill(s) as you like. A character's skill level in these areas will determine what they are able to produce and how they can contribute to

larger projects. A group that wants to contribute toward a larger project will require members that meet the project's skill and resource requirements. For example, to build a temple, a group might require one person with a skill-level in building of 16 points or higher, another with skill in art of 16 points or higher, as well as any required supplies and costs, such as wealth, food, paints, and so forth. Each project will reward its contributors with points of merit, to be shared equally among participants and, in some cases, with the community at large. Your character's individual merit as well as the community's collective merit will aid you during certain events that may threaten the community, such as weather disasters. There will be set dates throughout the year when your characters can work together on larger projects.

You must keep careful records of your character's development. In the week following an event, you will compose a writing assignment explaining what happened to your character (see below for additional details). You will note changes to his/her skill levels on that blog, record it on your character card (which you should bring to class each week), and also on an online spreadsheet so that others may see how your skills are developing. An awareness of other characters' particular skills will help you find appropriate collaborators for major projects.

It is remotely possible that your character may die during the course of the year. If this happens, you will be reborn as a different character, retaining the skills acquired in the first life. Dying will not negatively affect your grade in the course.

Writing assignments

Throughout the year, both your character and his or her community will be faced with a variety of events, some good, some not. During event weeks, you will be required to write a short essay, to be published as a blog on Blackboard for others to read, that describes how the event affected your character and how your character understands what happened to him or her. The events will often relate to the required readings of the course, which should be used to help shape your entry. Extra research is also encouraged. Excelling in your blog entries may also provide bonuses for your character, such as extra food, wealth, or merit. Areas to focus on to receive bonuses are: the quality of your writing (i.e., clarity, grammar, and creativity), your role-playing (i.e., how well your blog sees the world

through the eyes of a Buddhist), and your research (i.e., your writing should reflect things you've learned from lectures, assigned readings, or additional research you might have done).

Minor and major events

At the beginning of 14 of our class meetings, an event will be announced, e.g., hailstorms, droughts, contagious diseases, harvest times, the black magic of a sorcerer, the performance of a major ritual, a visiting teacher, or an invading army. Each event will have a specific effect on your character, depending on what skills and protective objects you have in your possession at that time. For example, if a contagious disease strikes the area and you have in your possession a disease-protecting talisman, then you will be spared the ill-effects of that illness. Major events will be prophesied several weeks before taking place so you may prepare yourself. In these cases, you may also be able to band together with other students to resist an attack, for example, or to more effectively benefit from a boon. Full details on these possibilities will be provided in class.

Finding objects

Throughout the year, in addition to accumulating skills in class, you will also be able to collect powerful physical objects that have been hidden around the Buddhist universe (i.e., the University campus). The location of these objects and their particular powers will be announced in class. It would be strategic of you to collect as many of these as you can, as they will help you withstand hazardous events and complete the final project more smoothly. Examples of the objects are as follows:

- amulets, talismans, and tattoo charms - protect against various kinds of disasters
- scriptures, prayer wheels, religious statues and paintings - needed for temple building and travel
- natural dye - enables you to write texts or make paintings
- barley flour - for making ritual dough statues (*forma*)
- hair and bone relics, holy water, precious pills - for making ritual objects and places more powerful
- medicine - for healing or protection against disease
- weapons, ritual daggers, and ice axes - for protection against invading armies or for travel

Continued on next page

- gold - for trading, painting, or making statues
- white offering scarves - mandatory for offering to visiting teachers
- chariot - for transportation

When you collect an object from its hidden location, it will have an information sheet that explains what it is and how it works. You must bring the object to class within a week in order to receive the effects of its power. Rare objects will be returned to the instructor; common objects may be kept in your treasury. When you show your object to the instructor she will verify your discovery by signing your character card.

Final research projects

In the second semester you will be working on a final research project - you may do this by yourself or with a team of 1-3 other students. You may choose one of the three projects below or, with the instructor's advance permission, you may create your own project. Your team will give a presentation to the class on the last day of class, and you each individually will complete a written report discussing your project, also due on the last day of class. Detailed guidelines for this paper will be provided later. For each of the three projects below, the instructor will provide a core set of readings that you must do as preparatory research; you should also look for other readings on your own. These projects are academic in nature - that is, you do not physically have to do the work described. You will do your best to assemble the team needed for the project you choose, and then explain how the team completed the project. If you do the project by yourself, you will have to adjust the scope accordingly and explain how you were able to do the work given your own skills and tools. The earlier you can think about what project you will do, the better, so you can accumulate the necessary skills and tools. The three project options are as follows - we will discuss this assignment in much greater detail later in the year.

1. Construct a major Buddhist building

For this project, you will have to select a suitable location, prepare the site, and gather the necessary supplies to build a temple, monastery, stupa, or other Buddhist building. You will do research on auspicious locations for building and on rituals that prepare the ground for building, on supplies needed for building what you have chosen to construct (e.g., gold, murals, precious objects, texts), and on the kinds of people you might need on your team in order to complete this task (e.g., patrons, monks/nuns, painters, builders).

2. Open a hidden land

For this project you will have to assemble a suitable team, travel to the kind of location that may have a hidden land, and find the key and door. You will do research on the locations of hidden lands, and you will need to look into the kinds of equipment, expertise, and ritual, scholarly, or contemplative skills you might need to find the door.

3. Conduct a major ritual

For this project, you will organize and conduct a major, multi-day ritual. You will need to decide what kind of ritual it is, find a location, organize the right supplies and gather experienced team members.

DISPOSITION FAQ

I was assigned farmer but I'd rather be an adept. Can I change characters?

On the day you are assigned your character, you may trade with someone in the class if you can find someone who wants to trade, but after that you cannot change. You can, however, cultivate skills in other areas; some farmers are also excellent adepts, meditators, or magicians. If you happen to die, you will be assigned a new character.

Can I search for hidden objects with a classmate?

You can go hunting for hidden objects with a classmate, yes, but if it is a rare object and there is only one of them, only one of you may bring it to class to receive the benefit. If it is a common object, there may be many copies, in which case you can each have one.

How long can I keep a rare object in my possession?

When you collect an object from its hidden location, you must bring it to class in order to receive the effects of its power. Rare objects will be returned to the instructor; common objects may be kept in your treasury. When you show your object to the instructor she will verify your discovery by signing your character card.

I left my treasury on the subway. Will I fail the class?

There will be no harm done, in terms of your class performance. If you are keeping your character card and your rosary inside your

treasury and have therefore lost both of these identity records, remember that there is also a record of your skill development online. There are two options here - your character may be reconstructed, or you may die and be reborn. Let the instructor know right away so she can advise you. This is one good reason, by the way, that you should maintain careful records online of your character's skills and the objects you have collected.

I think this game is stupid. Can I take the class without playing?

No. But please do bring it up in class if you unclear about the point of anything you are asked to do as part of this class. The game has specific learning objectives that you should understand.

I'm feeling very anxious about the possibility that my character might die. What should I do?

Your class performance will not be negatively affected if you die - you will simply be reborn as a new character. If you really feel uncomfortable about the possibility of your character's dying, however, for personal or other reasons, please let the instructor know and she can ensure your safety. We anticipate that very few characters will die this year.

Logistical Details

Class meets each Wednesday from 11-1 in Victoria College, Room 323.

Course details, announcements, and student blog writings will be conducted on Blackboard.

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The Fine Print

Accessibility Needs

If you require special accommodations or have any accessibility concerns about the course, the classroom or course materials, contact the instructor and also Accessibility Services as soon as possible:
disability.services@utoronto.ca or
<http://www.accessibility.utoronto.ca/>.

Academic Integrity

Academic Integrity is a fundamental value essential to the pursuit of learning and scholarships at the University of Toronto. Participating honestly, respectfully, responsibly, and fairly in this academic community ensures that the UofT degree that you earn will continue to be valued and respected as a true signifier of a student's individual work and academic achievement. <http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm> outlines the behaviours that constitute academic misconduct, the process for addressing academic offences, and the penalties that may be imposed. You are expected to be familiar with the contents of this document. Potential offences include, but are not limited to: Using someone else's ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgement; Submitting your own work in more than one course without the permission of the instructor; Making up sources or facts; Obtaining or providing unauthorized assistance on any assignment (this includes collaborating with others on assignments that are supposed to be completed

individually). All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be investigated by the following procedures outlined in the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters. If you have any question about what is or not is permitted in the course, please do not hesitate to contact the course instructor. If you have any questions about appropriate research and citation methods, you are expected to seek out additional information from the instructor or other UofT resources such as College Writing Centres or the Academic Success Centre.

Missed Assignments

Students may miss an assignment or quiz due to illness, domestic affliction, or in the case of part-time students, work commitments, without academic penalty providing the appropriate documentation is received and approved in a timely manner. In such cases students must notify the Instructor on the date of the missed assignment or midterm and a medical certificate, employer's letter or other supporting evidence must be submitted to the Instructor within 48 hours of the due date of the assignment or the test date. Students who do not provide the Instructor appropriate or sufficient supporting documentation will be given a grade of 0 (zero) for the assignment. Please note that pre-planned medical services or illnesses taking place close to the submission deadline will be taken into consideration at the instructor's discretion.

Learning Objectives

This course has been designed to help you meet the following learning objectives:

You will be able to identify key terms and locations important to the study of Buddhism

You will be able to discuss and evaluate central ideas and practices of Buddhism

You will recognize the historical and geographic diversity of Buddhist traditions

You will recognize major theoretical approaches to the study of religion

You will be able to see and discuss links between religious ideas and practices and other dimensions of culture and social life

You will practice working with a team to complete a project that integrates original research with classroom learning, embodied experience, and informed critical opinions

You will learn how to read religious texts critically and apply knowledge to practical situations