

THE BUDDHA AND BUDDHISM
RLGS 3820

Instructor: Celeste Rossmiller
1654 Humboldt St., Denver CO 80218
crossmil@du.edu

Institution: University of Denver
Religious Studies Dept., Sturm Hall 166
2000 E. Asbury Ave.
Denver CO 80208
(Private University; originally associated with United Methodist Church)

Course Level and Type: upper division Undergraduate/Graduate; lecture & seminar
10-week Quarter, meeting once/week for four hours in evening
Enrollment: 19 students (5 graduate; 13 undergraduate; 1 community auditor)
Taught one quarter per year, AY 2002-03; 2003-04; 2004-05

Pedagogical Reflections:

Both students and I would prefer to have the class run two nights (or days!) of the week, rather than a four-hour session once/week, but department head indicated that the university assigns time-slots according to centrality of subject matter to majors. Hence, I vary presentational style and learning modalities through incorporating Buddhist artworks and educational videos, along with lecture, small groups discussions, and small group and/or graduate student presentations. I have learned that watching select portions of videos, with a definitive perspective, is often more useful than viewing the entire film.

The first year, there were no graduates enrolled; the undergraduates had a mid-term exam and a final research paper. I discovered a sharp drop-off of reading and participation after midterm.

The second year, grad students had extra reading assignments part of the time, and a final research paper, along with participation in the group site-visit/report. Undergrads had one 3-5 page paper and a mid-term and final exam.

I am very pleased with the modifications I made this year. All students, as in previous years, had the geography quiz week two, to help them envision the Asian lands of Buddhism's foundations (though map, as we all know, is not territory...). Undergrads had two shorter quizzes and three 3-5 page papers on assigned topics, covering course developments. As before, students found site visits and discussions with practicing Buddhists informative. Graduate students reported and led discussion on readings deemed somewhat beyond undergrad comprehension; they also delved into research of interest to their own fields.

For final exam period, we visit a local restaurant serving food indigenous to one of the Buddhist countries, and present brief research reports to each other.

**To Avoid Evil
To Do Good
To Purify the Mind:
This is the teaching of
all the Buddhas**

*The Dhammapada, Sayings of the
Buddha*

THE UNIVERSITY OF DENVER
Department of Religious Studies
Winter 2005

RLGS 3820 THE BUDDHA & BUDDHISM

(4 Credit Hours)

Mondays 6:00-9:50 p.m

Sturm Hall 253

Instructor: Celeste Rossmiller, PhD Cand.
Dept. of Religious Studies, Sturm Hall, Suite 166
Email: crossmil@du.edu

Office Hours: MONDAYS 3:15-5:15 (Rm 260 Sturm); OR call, email or speak with me to arrange another time at our mutual convenience. I am always happy to meet with you to discuss progress and questions. Home Phone: (303) 355-6689 (call between 9:00 a.m. and 8:30 p.m.; leave a message on answering machine if you wish a return call)

Course Description: Religion has always been a facet or expression of human cultures. It is deeply embedded in and intertwined with a people's worldview, i.e., with how "Reality" is perceived and even fashioned. In some historical moments, religious figures or movements support the *status quo*—the temple, so to speak, upholding the throne, and *vice versa*.

But at other times, there are persons or movements that arise in confrontation with given worldviews and cultures, who challenge the social system, even including its religious expression. These religious personalities or movements deconstruct "Reality" as it is conventionally understood, and offer alternative worldviews and ways of life, paths that lead to untried, if true, places.

Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, was arguably one of the most outstanding examples of this latter type of religious manifestation. His *Dharma* (Teachings) unfolded a unique path to human liberation. The *Sangha* (corps of the followers who formed around him) learned, taught, modified, meditated on, and practiced those teachings, in widening geographical and cultural settings, down to the present day.

This 10-week study of the Buddha and Buddhism has these **GOALS**, then:

1. To study Buddhism in its foundational years, appreciating some of the historical context that gave rise to the Buddha and his Dharma.
2. To analyze how the foundational core grows and changes as it moves into new times and cultures, while noting which elements retain their centrality. We can see its movement from being deconstructive to supporting *status quo* and back again over time and place.
3. To appreciate the experience(s) of this complex religion for the people engaged in it through study of primary, secondary, and biographical writings, artworks and film. Women's roles and experiences, often untold and/or overlooked, will hold a place in our considerations of Buddhism throughout its history.
4. Finally, we will put this study into our own context as denizens of the 21st century: what does Buddhism have to teach us about understanding and perhaps rectifying the personal, social, ecological, and economic malaise we experience around and within us? With no expectations to adopt Buddhist life-ways personally, we can still ask of this long-lived religion/philosophy the questions that most concern us as humans on our own paths.

Prerequisites: This course is aimed at upper division undergraduates and graduate students. Freshmen and sophomores admitted by permission of instructor.

Required Texts: (One copy of all texts will be on reserve in Penrose.)

Mitchell, Donald W. *Buddhism: Introducing the Buddhist Experience*. NY: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Tsomo, Karma Lekshe, ed. *Buddhist Women Across Cultures: Realizations*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999.

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

Additional readings on Electronic Reserve through Penrose Library.

Recommended Text:

Watson, Burton, trans. *The Essential Lotus: Selections from the Lotus Sutra*. NY: Columbia University Press, 2002.

Course Requirements:

1. Completion of assigned reading as scheduled, and participation in class discussion on scheduled readings. This is an interactive course in which all of us are learners whose insights and ideas and questions are to be valued. Your attendance and participation are a significant component of our study together.

Given the fact that we have only ten meetings together [not counting the scheduled final exam], absences will detract from your course grade in a significant way. If you are signing up for this course, please honor that contract by keeping this commitment of time, availability and active participation. In other words, attendance is mandatory. If you find you *must* be absent, please let me know in advance of the session. *Two absences will result in a drop of your course grade; more than two (2) absences will result in a failing grade for the course.*

2. Members of the class will self-select into groups to visit various Buddhist centers and participate in one of their practice events. They will prepare an oral report to the class on various aspects of that form or school of Buddhism according to a format to be distributed in class. The report will be presented on the night on which we study that particular aspect of Buddhism.
3. Written assignments as follows:
Undergraduates: 3 quizzes, 3 three-five-page papers, due weeks 3, 7, & 10.
Graduates: 1 quiz; 10-15 page research paper, due at final exam period. In addition, each graduate student will be responsible for a brief oral presentation on one of the course readings, as listed in the syllabus, and leading a discussion question from the reading.

No late papers, make-up quizzes, or incompletes without prior permission of instructor.

(Papers to be double-spaced, NO cover sheet, 10-12 font, one-inch margins; printed two-sided and/or on recycled paper! Use MLA or APA format for quoting & bibliography)

Grading:

Undergraduates

5% Geography quiz
 15% Participation
 15% Group Presentation
 45% Three 3-5-page papers
 20% Two quizzes

Graduates

5% Geography quiz
 15% Participation
 15% Group Presentation
 15% 10-minute presentation on reading
 50% Research Paper

CLASS SCHEDULE

Please always do the readings before class **[including for Week 1]**, and bring your books & notes with you.

WEEK 1

Artwork: 4 Great Miracles

Introduction to course, and Life of the Buddha

Mitchell, chapter 1 (pp. 9-32)

Tsomo, Intro. (pp. 1-9)

Film: *Little Buddha* and Joseph Campbell, *The Enlightened One* [Mythos Series]; excerpts.

WEEK 2

Central Teachings of the Buddha

Artwork: The Buddha turning the Wheel of Dharma

Geography Quiz at the beginning of class

Mitchell, chapter 2 (pp. 33-63)

Tsomo, chapter 1: Harris, "The Female in Buddhism..." (49-65)

Additional readings on electronic reserve:

1. Armstrong, Guy. "Am I or Am I Not? The Dilemma of Not-Self."
2. Schelling, Andrew & Anne Waldman, trans. Selections from the *Songs of the Sons and Daughters of Buddha*. (Note that a number of the songs of the *theris* – nuns – are also quoted in the essay from Tsomo.)
3. GRAD STUDENTS ONLY: Nhat Hanh, Thich. "The Foundation of Mindfulness," in *The Miracle of Mindfulness: A Manual on Meditation* (rev. ed.).

Film: *The Footprint of the Buddha* (Long Search Series)

WEEK 3

Theravada: the Way of the Elders

Artwork: Ashoka, Lion Pillar

Mitchell, chapter 3 (64-95)

Tsomo, pp. 9-15, and chap. 2: "Buddhist Women in India & Sri Lanka" (67-77)

Presentations on Insight Meditation Society/Vipassana Meditation
And Wat Buddhawararam (DenverThai Temple)

Undergrad. 3-5 page paper due Check Blackboard for details.

Film: *I am a Monk*

WEEK 4

Artwork: Burning House [pl 4][or Bodhisattvas springing up pl 23-4 Lotus]

Mahayana: The Great Vehicle

Mitchell, chapter 4 (96-125) – {Grad. Students, chap. 5}

Tsomo, chapter 6, "Can Women Achieve Enlightenment" GRAD STUDENTS ONLY

Lotus Sutra, chapter 2 and 3 Book on library reserve, or see

<<http://www.sgi-usa.org/buddhism/library/Buddhism/LotusSutra/>>

Thich Nhat Hanh, *Heart of Understanding*, pages 1-18

Grad. Students: 1-2 page Research paper proposals/ bibliography
in progress due

Film: *Interview with Thich Nhat Hanh*

WEEK 5 Artwork: Kuan Yin [plate 37, *Lotus*, e.g.]

Quiz: Central Teachings, Mahayana

Buddhism spreads into China

Mitchell, chapter 7 (178-217)

Tsomo, Intro pp. 19-21, chapter 4 (91-103)

Lotus, chapter 12

Film: *Silk Road: "Across the Pamir"*

WEEK 6 Artwork: Sakyamuni Triad [pl 34 *Jap. Lotus*]

Korean and Japanese Developments in Buddhism – Part I

Mitchell, chapter 8 (218-228) & chapter 9 (241-262, 267-72)

Lotus Sutra, chapter 22 & 25 (see above references)

Presentations on Japanese Pure Land Temple

Film: *The Long Search: Land of the Disappearing Buddha*

WEEK 7 Artwork: Ten Ox-Herding Pictures

Korean and Japanese Developments part II – Sôn/Zen

Mitchell, chapter 8 (228-235) & chapter 9 (262-267, 272-79)

Tsomo, chapter 5: "Japanese Nuns..." (105-122)

Additional readings, electronic reserve:

Batchelor, Martine. "The Ten Ox-Herding Pictures."

Presentations on Denver Zen Center

Film: *Principles and Practices of Zen [or Zen Meditation]*

Undergrads: **3-5 page paper due** on Mahayana; details on Blackboard.

WEEK 8 Artwork: Mandala or Vajrayogini

Vajrayana Buddhism—The Diamond Vehicle: Tantric Buddhism in Tibet

Mitchell, chapter 6 (151-77)

Tsomo, chapter 9 (169-89)

(Grad. Students) *Lady of the Lotus-Born* (about Yeshe Tsogyel) [on reserve] –
your choice of two chapters

Presentations on Tibetan Buddhist sanghas or stupa

Film: *Tibetan Book of the Dead*

WEEK 9 Artwork: Everyday life [pl 40 *Jap Lotus*]

QUIZ: Chinese Multi-system Schools, Nichiren, Pure Land, Zen (Chinul, Soto, Rinzai), Tibetan
Contemporary Buddhism, part I: Buddhism in the 20th-21st Century; Socially Engaged
Buddhism

Mitchell, chapter 10 (283-315) and chapter 11 (334-49; grad. students, full chapter)

Tsomo, chapter 14, "Aung San Suu Kyi" (259-66)

Additional Readings, electronic reserve: Kenneth Kraft

Presentation on Soka Gakkai (SGI) and/or Buddhist Peace Fellowship

Film: *Doing Time, Doing Vipassana*

WEEK 10 Artwork: [crocheted piece as example of Indra's Net]
Contemporary Buddhism, part II: Indra's Jeweled Net: Buddhism and Ecology
 Thich Nhat Hanh, *Heart of Understanding*, p. 19-end of book
Additional Readings, electronic reserve: *Dharma Rain*
 GRAD STUDENTS ONLY – Macy, Joanna Rogers. "Dependent Co-arising: The Distinctiveness of Buddhist Ethics." *Journal of Religious Ethics* 7 (Spring 1979): 38-52.

Undergrads: 3-5 page paper due on Contemporary Buddhism; details on Blackboard.

FINAL EXAM PERIOD

Attendance required. [Grad. Students: Present summary of your research; Undergrads: be prepared to present a 3-5 minute summary of last paper and evaluation/summation of course. If you want your paper returned to you, please provide a S.A.S.E. with your paper.]

WEBSITES

The following sites are the most scholarly and reliable that I know of:

Buddhist Studies WWW Virtual Library:
<http://www.ciolek.com/WWWVL-Buddhism.html>

Theravada site:
<http://world.std.com/~metta/>

Journal of Buddhist Ethics:
 For links to scholarly resources: <http://jbe.la.psu.edu/scholar.html>

For links to Buddhist studies global resources: <http://jbe.la.psu.edu/global.html>