



Buddhism



RELI 200 / EAST 251

Bucknell University • Religion / East Asian Studies • Fall 2008
Coleman Hall Rm 22 • MWF 11:00-11:52 a.m.

Professor: James Mark Shields • #71336 • jms089@bucknell.edu

Office: Coleman Hall Rm 11

Office hours: MWF 2:00-3:00 p.m., or by appointment
www.facstaff.bucknell.edu/jms089

Why are we here? This is the proverbial question posed in undergraduate courses dealing with Western philosophy and religion, but it is also a question that has relevance in the philosophical and religious traditions of the East, of which Buddhism is one of the most important. However, it also has a more direct and concrete application for us: *Why are you here, at Bucknell University, studying Buddhism?* This second sense of this grand old question should serve as both a starting and an end point for our investigations, as it will allow us to keep in mind that philosophy and religion are and must always be ‘existential’, i.e., rooted in and reflective of a particular human needs and contexts—social, cultural, economic, artistic and psychological.

This course provides an introduction to the religious tradition of Buddhism through study of its origins, basic beliefs, practices and values, historical development, as well as its interaction and involvement with politics, culture, art and society. Along the way we will examine not only the principle tenets and doctrines of the religion in its textual and ideal forms, but also the context in which it arose and developed over the centuries (i.e., how Buddhism works ‘on the ground’). Particular attention will be given to Buddhist material culture, since it is largely through stupas, relics, works of art, and temples that Buddhist teachings were spread across Asia.

Course Objectives:

The primary objective of the course is to help students figure out the meaning of life. Just kidding. Actually, its aims are rather less grandiose: to help students: a) develop a knowledge and understanding of the basic teachings of Buddhism with regard to the nature of reality, the idea of the self (or lack of such), ethical principles, and methods of meditation; b) examine the historical development of Buddhism in Asia, including the changes that Buddhism underwent over its history and cultural diffusion, with particular attention to the effect Buddhism has had on social values, political ideas and institutions and material culture; and c) to explore the movement of Buddhism to the West in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, including its relevance to contemporary issues and its future prospects.

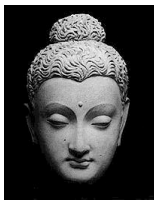
Course Format:

The course will follow a lecture-discussion format, with three lectures of roughly 40 minutes each on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Generally each week of lectures will encompass a new theme, as dictated by the Schedule of Topics and Readings (see below). Each lecture is accompanied by a reading from one of the course texts, familiarity with which will greatly enhance comprehension of the lecture. Please be prepared. I have tried to keep the readings to a minimum, in part because I realize that you have a lot of other reading to do, and in part because I want as much as possible for you to spend your time thinking about the ideas, and, wherever possible, trying to 'ground them' in your own life and in the context of the contemporary world. The final 10-12 minutes at the end of each class will be left for questions of clarification and, it is hoped, an open discussion of any ideas presented. Friday classes will often be set aside for further discussion.

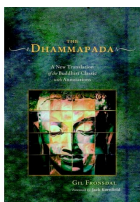
Pedagogical Note:

I want to create at all times a comfortable, enjoyable, and at times provocative environment for learning. This is meant to be an *interactive* course; the student will be asked to respond and engage with the course material, and with the ideas and opinions of the instructor and other students—though, it is hoped, always in a civil and polite fashion. Evaluation for the course will be based largely on the demonstration of critical engagement with course material. I will also be employing various media, including Powerpoint presentations, video and DVDs, CDs, and interactive CD-ROMs, in order to stimulate as many learning faculties as possible. Powerpoints will be available prior to each class for those who wish to print them as a basis for note taking.

Required reading material:



- *Buddhism: The e-Book*. 2nd edition.
(Charles Prebish & Damien Keown, eds.
JBE Online Books, 2005)



- *The Dhammapadam*
(Gil Fronsdal, trans. Shambala, 2005)



- *The Heart of Understanding*
(Thich Nhat Hanh. Parallax, 1988)



- *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*
(Shunryu Suzuki. Berkeley: Weatherhill, 1970)

Blackboard Readings: See page 4

Course requirements:

1. ATTENDANCE

Recently, I have decided NOT to make attendance mandatory in my classes. Instead, I have increased the weight of the participation grade (from 10% to 15%). Thus, while it is up to you to decide whether you want to come to class, it will be difficult to score well on participation without regular attendance.

2. PARTICIPATION

15%

Significant class participation is a requirement. Participation is a matter of quality not quantity. Thus you do not have to speak every class, but rather show that you have done the readings and are willing and able to engage, in a thoughtful way, with the topics under discussion. Of course, good questions are also an aspect of participation.

3. ENGAGEMENT PIECES (EPs)

5 X 5% = 25%

Throughout the duration of the course, you will be required to write a total of five short (1000 word) "engagement pieces," in response to an issue or question raised in the lectures or the readings. These pieces will take a variety of forms, and each will have its own specific requirements. Generally, the EPs will be graded in terms of your ability to critically engage with a specific text, issue or question (note: critically does not mean negatively). Any opinion or idea is valid, providing you can back it up evidentially (or, failing that, rhetorically). As the term progresses, evaluation will become more demanding. All Engagement Pieces must be submitted to me electronically (i.e., I will *not* accept paper copies).

4. UNIT QUIZZES

3 X 10% = 30%

There will be three in-class unit quizzes during the semester, the first on the origins, early development and basic ideas of Buddhism, the second on Theravada, or 'Southern' Buddhism, and the third on Mahayana or 'Northern' Buddhism. The specific format will be specified in advance, and, if required, some class time will be provided for questions and discussion prior to quiz days.

5. FINAL TAKE-HOME EXAM

30%

On the last day of class, Monday, December 8, I will hand out the Final Take Home Exam. You will have exactly one week to complete the exam, which consists of a series of short essay questions on various themes related to Buddhism. As with the EPs, I will expect your answers to be submitted to me electronically (i.e., I will *not* accept paper copies).

GRADING RUBRIC:	93-100%	=	A	4.00	NEAR PERFECT!
	88-92%	=	A-	3.67	EXCELLENT
	83-87%	=	B+	3.33	VERY GOOD
	78-82%	=	B	3.00	GOOD
	73-77%	=	B-	2.67	AVERAGE
	68-72%	=	C+	2.33	BELOW AVERAGE
	63-67%	=	C	2.00	ACCEPTABLE, BUT...
	58-62%	=	C-	1.50	NOT SO GOOD
	50-57%	=	D	1.00	POOR
	0-49%	=	F	0.00	NOT ACCEPTABLE

*For more information, see "Grading Policies" handout

Blackboard Readings

1. KEOWN, Damien. "Buddhism and Elephants." In *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction*, pp. 1-14. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
2. HORI, Victor Sōgen. "Sweet and Sour Buddhism." *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*, Fall 1994.
3. ERALY, Abraham. "A Savior is Born." In *Gem in the Lotus: The Seeding of Indian Civilization*, pp. 201-209. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2000.
4. HARVEY, Peter. "Key Buddhist Values." *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, pp. 60-90. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
5. MURCOTT, Susan. "Mahapajapati Gotami & Her Disciples." In *The First Buddhist Women: Translations and Commentaries on the Therīgāthā*, pp. 13-30; 191-195. Berkeley, CA: Parallax.
6. ERALY, Abraham. "All Men Are My Children." In *Gem in the Lotus: The Seeding of Indian Civilization*, pp. 323-332. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2000.
7. DEHEJIA, Vidya. "Stories in Stone: The Popular Appeal of Early Buddhist Art." In *Indian Art*, pp. 49-76. London: Phaidon, 1997.
8. SHIELDS, James Mark. "When You Meet A Stone Buddha in the Desert...." *Peace Research: The Canadian Journal of Peace Studies* 33 (2): 99-101, 2001.
9. GOMBRICH, Richard. "The Buddhist Tradition in Sri Lanka." In *Theravāda Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo*. London: Routledge, 1988.
10. BUNNAG, Jane. "The Way of the Monk and the Way of the World: Buddhism in Thailand, Laos and Cambodia." In *The World of Buddhism*, edited by Heinz Bechert and Richard Gombrich, pp. 159-170. London: Thames & Hudson, 1984.
11. AUNG San Suu Kyi. "Truth is a Powerful Weapon." In *The Voice of Hope*, pp. 51-65. New York: Seven Stories Press, 1996.
12. AUNG San Suu Kyi. "Towards a True Refuge." In *Freedom from Fear, and Other Writings*, revised edition, pp. 239-248. London: Penguin Books, 1995.
13. STRONG, John S. "Saviors and Siddhas: The Mahāyāna Pantheon and Tantric Buddhism." In *The Experience of Buddhism: Sources and Interpretations*, 3rd edition, pp. 188-205. Wadsworth, 2007.
14. LEIGHTON, Taigen Daniel. "The Bodhisattva Ideal: Benefiting Beings." In *Bodhisattva Archetypes: Classic Buddhist Guides to Awakening and their Modern Expression*, pp. 1-21. New York: Penguin, 1998.
15. NĀGĀRJUNA. "Chapter XXV: Examination of Nirvana." In *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, pp. 322-334. Translation and commentary by Jay L. Garfield. New York: Oxford, 1995.
16. WILLIAMS, Paul. "Hua-yen: The Flower Garland Tradition." In *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*, pp. 116-138. London: Routledge, 1989.
17. WILLIAMS, Paul. "The Saṃdharmapūṇḍarīka (Lotus) Sūtra and its Influences." In *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*, pp. 141-159. London: Routledge, 1989.
18. Excerpts from the *Lotus Sūtra* (Columbia, 1993) and the *Flower Garland Sutra* (Shambala, 1993).
19. RAMBELLI, Fabio. "Just Behave as You Like; Prohibitions and Impurities Are Not a Problem." In *Approaching the Land of Bliss: Religious Praxis in the Cult of Amitabha*, pp. 169-201. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004.
20. DŌGEN. Excerpts from *Shōbōgenzō*, translated by Thomas Cleary. Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1986.
21. HISAMATSU Shin'ichi. "Zen Aesthetics." *Zen and the Fine Arts*. Tokyo: Kodansha, 1971.
22. KING, Winston. "The Zen Sword: A Modern Association." *Zen and the Way of the Sword*. New York: OUP, 1993.
23. HORI, Victor Sōgen. "The Nature of Rinzai Zen Kōan Practice." In *Zen Sand: The Book of Capping Phrases for Kōan Practice*, pp. 5-15. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003.
24. BRAUEN, Martin. "The Other Mandala: Tantric Method." In *The Mandala: Sacred Circle in Tibetan Buddhism*, pp. 36-79. Boston: Shambala, 1997.
25. DALAI LAMA. "Modern Society and the Quest for Human Happiness." In *Ethics for the New Millennium*, pp. 3-17. London: Penguin, 2001.



Buddhism



Schedule of Topics and Readings

I. Introduction

W 08/27	1. Course Introduction	BB	Keown
F 08/29*	2. DISCUSSION: What's it all about?	BB	Hori 1

II. Buddha

M 09/01	3. Mother Goddesses, Priests and Dropouts	EBK	14-24
W 09/03	4. CD-ROM: Life of Siddhartha Gautama	EBK	49-75
F 09/05*	5. DISCUSSION: Life and Times of the Buddha	BB	Eraly 1

III. Dharma

M 09/08	6. Suffering: Four Noble Truths	EBK	76-96
W 09/10	7. The Way Out: Eightfold Path	DHP	
F 09/12†	8. DISCUSSION: <i>Dhammapada</i>	DHP	
M 09/15	9. Impermanence, No-Self, Nirvana	EBK	96-101
W 09/17*	10. Ethics: Compassion & the Precepts	BB	Harvey
F 09/19	QUIZ #1		

IV. Sangha

M 09/22	11. Popular Buddhism: Karma & Cosmology	EBK	25-48
W 09/24	12. Monasticism: The Early Sangha	EBK	102-119
F 09/26†	13. DISCUSSION: The First Buddhist Women	BB	Murcott
M 09/29	14. Buddhism Expands: Ashoka the Great	BB	Eraly 2
W 10/01	15. Bones & Stones: Buddhist Material Culture	BB	Dehejia
F 10/03*	16. DVD: <i>Giant Buddhas of Bamiyan</i>	BB	Shields 1

V. Theravada: Way of the Elders

M 10/06	17. Buddhism in Sri Lanka	BB	Gombrich
W 10/08	18. Buddhism in Thailand, Laos, Cambodia	BB	Bunnag
F 10/10†	19. DISCUSSION: Buddhism & Social Protest	BB	Aung (2)
M 10/13	FALL RECESS—NO CLASS		
W 10/15	20. DVD: <i>Dhamma Brothers</i>		
F 10/17	QUIZ #2		

VI. Mahayana: The Great Vehicle

M 10/20	21. Origins of the Mahayana	EBK	150-168
W 10/22	22. Devotion: Celestial Buddhas & Bodhisattvas	BB	Strong
F 10/24*	23. DISCUSSION: The Bodhisattva Path	BB	Leighton
M 10/27	24. Nagarjuna & the Perfection of Wisdom	BB	Nāgārjuna
W 10/29	25. "Form is Emptiness, Emptiness is Form"	HRT	
F 10/31†	26. DISCUSSION: What is Emptiness?	HRT	

VII. East Asian Buddhism: Variations

M 11/03	27. Buddhism in China: Origins & Changes	BB	Williams 1
W 11/05	28. <i>Lotus and Flower Garland Sutras</i>	BB	Williams 2
F 11/07	29. Pure Land Buddhism	BB	Rambelli
M 11/10	30. Zen: Origins & Doctrine	BB	Dōgen
W 11/12	31. Soto Zen: Mediation and Practice	ZM	
F 11/14*	32. DISCUSSION: <i>Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind</i>	ZM	
M 11/17	33. Rinzai Zen: The Martial Path	BB	King
W 11/19	34. The Zen Kōan	BB	Hori 2
F 11/21†	35. GUEST SPEAKER: Pennsylvania Zen		
M 11/24	QUIZ #3		

W 11/26	THANKSGIVING RECESS – NO CLASS
F 11/28	THANKSGIVING RECESS – NO CLASS

VIII. Vajrayana: The Diamond Path

M 12/01	36. Buddhism in Tibet I: Tantric Origins	EBK	264-285
W 12/03	37. Buddhism in Tibet II: Mantras & Mandalas	BB	Brauen
F 12/05	38. FILM: <i>Kundun: Life of the Dalai Lama</i>	BB	Dalai Lama

IX. Conclusions: Buddhism Today

M 12/08†	39. DISCUSSION: Western Buddhism	EBK	286-306
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TBA TAKE HOME EXAM DUE

* EP is assigned

† EP is due

Key:

BB = Blackboard Readings (see page 4 of Syllabus)

DHP = Fronsdal, Gil, ed., *Dhammapada*

EBK = Prebish, Charles, and Damien Keown. *Buddhism: The E-Book*

HRT = Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of Understanding* (includes the *Heart Sutra*)

ZM = Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*



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Fall 2008 • Professor Shields

ENGAGEMENT PIECE #1

Assigned: *Friday, August 29*
Due Date: *Monday, December 08*
Length: *1000 words, typed, double-spaced, reasonable font-size (11-12)*
Submission: *As Word document, sent to jms089@bucknell.edu*
Worth: *5% of final grade*

Throughout the duration of the course, students will be required to write a total of five short (specific length requirements will vary) "engagement pieces," in response to an issue or question raised in the lectures or the readings. These pieces will take a variety of forms, and each will have its own specific requirements. Generally, the EPs will be graded in terms of the student's ability to critically engage with a specific text, issue or question (note: critically does not mean "negatively"). Any opinion or idea is valid, providing you can back it up evidentially (or, failing that, rhetorically). As the term progresses, evaluation of the EPs will become more demanding.

PREAMBLE

As Buddhism has moved to the West in the past century, it has encountered cultures with religious foundations, values, and concerns quite distinct from those of the South and East Asian cultures in which its many variations have flourished over the past two millennia. Somewhat surprisingly, Buddhism—especially Zen and more recently Tibetan—has been readily adopted by a number of North Americans and Europeans searching for something that is perceived to be lacking or unfulfilled in their own traditions, or in the modern secular culture of the West. In the US, beyond its impact as a personal vehicle for transformation, Buddhism has had a significant if still somewhat peripheral role in shaping popular culture: art, literature, television, movies, music, and advertising. This mix of ancient Asian Buddhist ideas and practices with those of modern America often results in fascinating, though occasionally problematic cultural phenomena.

ASSIGNMENT

In this short assignment, I would like you to reflect personally and critically upon *at least two* examples of 'Buddhist-inspired' works of US popular culture. Such includes any product of US popular culture (e.g., movies, television shows, novels, poems, songs, commercials) dating from the 1960s to 2006. The Buddhist aspect can be explicit (as in *The Last Samurai*), or implicit (as in *Star Wars* or *The Matrix*). If implicit, you will have to make a clear argument for why you consider the work 'Buddhist' or 'Buddhist-inspired'. Think especially about the possible contradictions or problems of the use of Buddhist terms, ideas, symbols, or values in whatever works you choose. Creative interpretations are of course welcome.



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ENGAGEMENT PIECE #2

Assigned: *Friday, September 5*
Due Date: *Monday, September 12*
Length: *1000 words, typed, double-spaced, reasonable font-size (11-12)*
Submission: *As Word document, sent to jms089@bucknell.edu*
Worth: *5% of final grade*

Throughout the duration of the course, students will be required to write a total of five short (specific length requirements will vary) "engagement pieces," in response to an issue or question raised in the lectures or the readings. These pieces will take a variety of forms, and each will have its own specific requirements. Generally, the EPs will be graded in terms of the student's ability to critically engage with a specific text, issue or question (note: critically does not mean "negatively"). Any opinion or idea is valid, providing you can back it up evidentially (or, failing that, rhetorically). As the term progresses, evaluation of the EPs will become more demanding.

PREAMBLE

The *Dhammapada* (lit., "path of the Dharma"), written down in Pali in the 1st century CE, is one of the most important - and certainly the best loved - of all early Indian Buddhist texts. Its succinct poetry and clear expression of basic Buddhist ideals have made it the closest thing to a "sacred text" for many Buddhists, particularly but not exclusively those within the Southeast Asian (i.e., Theravada) streams. While it is certainly much more approachable than the bulk of the Pali Canon or other early Buddhist writings, the *Dhammapada* does contain subtleties that can be lost without close examination. Moreover, its teachings do not always cohere with later Buddhist ideas, especially those of the East Asian (i.e., Mahayana) traditions.

ASSIGNMENT

In this short assignment, I would like you to reflect personally and critically upon the *Dhammapada*. First, briefly explain, in a single paragraph, what you think is the central theme or idea expressed in this classic work. Give examples to support your case. Second, choose at least one passage from the text that you consider the most powerful; i.e., the passage or chapter that most strongly resonates with you personally. Explain why. Third, do the same thing for a passage or chapter that you find the least convincing or weakest. Finally, compare the teachings of the *Dhammapada* to those of any other religious tradition with which you are familiar, noting similarities and/or differences. You do not need to do any outside research for this piece, but you should think carefully and critically about the text (and your own ideas) before composing your response.



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ENGAGEMENT PIECE #3

Assigned: *Wednesday, September 17*
Due Date: *Friday, September 26*
Length: *1000 words, typed, double-spaced, reasonable font-size (11-12)*
Submission: *As Word document, sent to jms089@bucknell.edu*
Worth: *5% of final grade*

Throughout the duration of the course, students will be required to write a total of five short (specific length requirements will vary) "engagement pieces," in response to an issue or question raised in the lectures or the readings. These pieces will take a variety of forms, and each will have its own specific requirements. Generally, the EPs will be graded in terms of the student's ability to critically engage with a specific text, issue or question (note: critically does not mean "negatively"). Any opinion or idea is valid, providing you can back it up evidentially (or, failing that, rhetorically). As the term progresses, evaluation of the EPs will become more demanding.

PREAMBLE

Compassion (*karuna*) and charity (*dana*) are two of the most important Buddhist 'virtues'. However, to be fully compassionate and fully charitable at all times may lead to 'value conflict'. One finds this tension, and (perhaps) its resolution, in a number of Buddhist fables, including the Legend of Prince Vessantara.

ASSIGNMENT

In this short assignment, I would like you to reflect personally and critically upon the fundamental Buddhist principles of compassion and charity. Read the story of Prince Vessantara, the so-called 'master of charity'. What is the point of the story? Why might the story have been 'successful' at spreading Buddhism? What is the relationship between charity, compassion and suffering (*duhkha*), as expressed in the story? Finally, what are some weaknesses or tensions in the story, from a Buddhist or from a non-Buddhist perspective. Please reflect critically and personally on these issues, using what you have learned in class and in reading the eBook and *Dhammapada*. For extra credit, compare briefly with the biblical story of Abraham's Sacrifice (Gen 22).



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RELI 200 / EAST 251
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ENGAGEMENT PIECE #3

Assigned: *Monday, October 1*

Due Date: *Monday, October 8*

Length: *3 pages, typed, double-spaced, reasonable font-size (11-12)*

Worth: *5% of Final Grade*

Throughout the duration of the course, students will be required to write a total of five short (specific length requirements will vary) "engagement pieces," in response to an issue or question raised in the lectures or the readings. These pieces will take a variety of forms, and each will have its own specific requirements. Generally, the EPs will be graded in terms of the student's ability to critically engage with a specific text, issue or question (note: critically does not mean "negatively"). Any opinion or idea is valid, providing you can back it up evidentially (or, failing that, rhetorically). As the term progresses, evaluation of the EPs will become more demanding.

PREAMBLE

As you are all aware, the past several weeks have witnessed a growing crisis in the South Asian Buddhist country of Myanmar (formerly known as Burma). Although the details of the events are changing daily, the standoff between hundred if not thousands of Buddhist monks and their lay supporters on the one hand, and the entrenched military regime ("junta") on the other, seems to be spiralling to a Tiananmen Square-like climax (if you don't understand this reference, you should).

ASSIGNMENT

In this short assignment, I would like you to reflect personally and critically upon the present crisis gripping Myanmar. In your introduction, briefly tell me what is happening, why it began, and what role the monks are playing. The rest of the EP should be a critical reflection on these events, using your knowledge of Buddhism in general, and Theravada Buddhism in particular. Are the monks justified in their actions? Why or why not? Why do they hold such social power in Myanmar? Have they always been socially engaged—or is this new? Finally, how does this relate to the movement led by Aung San Suu Kyi?



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ENGAGEMENT PIECE #4

Assigned: *Friday, October 24*
Due Date: *Friday, October 31 (before 5:00 pm)*
Length: *1000 words, typed, double-spaced, reasonable font-size (11-12)*
Submission: *As Word document, sent to jms089@bucknell.edu*
Worth: *5% of final grade*

PREAMBLE

Emptiness (*shunyata*) is fundamental concept in the Mahayana as it evolved in India, West and Central Asia, and spread into China, Korea and Japan. One finds early expression of *shunyata* in the *Prajñāparamita Sūtras* (including the *Heart Sūtra*), as well as the work of the great Indian Mahayana philosopher-monk Nagarjuna (c. 150 CE), founder of the Madhyamika or 'Middle Way' school. The idea and 'practice' of emptiness goes hand-in-hand with the Way of the Bodhisattva—one might say, emptiness IS the practice of becoming a Bodhisattva. This becomes explicit in the later work of the Indian poet-philosopher Shantideva (c. 750 CE). Having said that, not all Mahayana schools agree on what emptiness/*shunyata* entails. A certain tension exists between the doctrine of emptiness and a view of the world that is nihilistic (i.e., nothing exists therefore nothing matters)—and Mahayana antinomianism (the willingness of bodhisattvas in certain situations to 'break the rules') has at times contributed to this conflation in the minds of critics. Another tension may exist between Mahayana emptiness as 'wisdom' and the practice of 'compassion' that is assumed to arise out of a recognition of emptiness. How, exactly, are these two related?

ASSIGNMENT

In this short assignment, I would like you to reflect personally and critically upon the Mahayana concept of emptiness/*shunyata*, as expressed in the PPS and the *Heart Sūtra*, as well as the teachings of Nagarjuna (BB: Nagarjuna & ebook ch. 6). Focus on what *you* believe is the proper understanding of emptiness; think about the relation between emptiness and compassion, and try to think of examples in your life that might either support or critique the Mahayana perspective. Support your points with the *Heart Sūtra*, as interpreted by Thich Nhat Hanh.



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ENGAGEMENT PIECE #5

Assigned: Friday, November 14
Due Date: Monday, December 1 (before 5:00 pm)
Length: 1000 words, typed, single-spaced, reasonable font-size (11-12)
Submission: As Word document, sent to jms089@bucknell.edu
Worth: 5% of final grade

PREAMBLE

As Mahayana and Vajrayana (i.e., tantric) Buddhism developed in China, Japan and Tibet, a number of new techniques began to emerge. Of these, two of the most recognizable are the Zen KOAN and the Vajrayana MANDALA. Though these two may represent opposite approaches to Buddhist awakening, each has proven long lasting within their respective traditions, and each has long been held in fascination by Westerners trying to come to terms with various forms of Asian Buddhism.

ASSIGNMENT

In this short assignment, I would like you to reflect personally and critically upon EITHER the Zen *koan* OR the Vajrayana *mandala*. Basic information can be found in the eBook, pp. 202-206.

For the Zen *koan*, read the article by Hori ("Rinzai Koan," on Blackboard), to get a sense of the nature and practice of *koan* in Rinzai Zen. You should then look for examples from the 'classic' Chan/Zen texts, such as the *Blue Cliff Record* or the *Gateless Gate* (many *koan* from these and other texts can be found on the internet). What exactly is a *koan*? How are they used in Rinzai Zen practice?

For Vajrayana *mandalas*, read the article by Brauen ("Mandalas," on Blackboard) for an introduction to the key elements of tantric method. A quick web search should bring up numerous examples of mandalas from the Tibetan-Nepalese traditions as well as Shingon esoteric tradition of Japan. What exactly is a *mandala*? How are they used in tantric Buddhist practice?

In either case, include your own (informed) impressions and ideas on *koan* or *mandalas*. Are there parallels in other religious traditions that you are familiar with? Finally, I would like you to construct a brief *koan* or a small *mandala* and include it with your paper, along with a brief explanation.

Student Name: _____



Buddhism



Final Take-Home Exam

Bucknell University

RELI 200 / EAST 251

Examiner: Prof. James Mark Shields

ASSIGNED: Monday, Dec. 8, 2008
10:15 a.m.

DUE: Monday, Dec. 15, 2008
5:00 pm

Instructions: Answer THREE (3) of the following SIX (6) questions as carefully and completely as you can, while keeping within the prescribed length restriction of AT LEAST 800 but NO MORE THAN 1000 words per question. You may utilize whatever sources you wish, though you MUST make use of any sources referred to in the questions. Please reference all sources used, with proper citations and a bibliography. Answers MUST be typed and single-spaced. You do not need to retype the questions, but make sure you note the NUMBER and TITLE of each question you have chosen to answer. Please submit the entire document via an email attachment on or before 5 pm on December 15th. Have fun!

ANSWER ANY THREE (3) OF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS

1. HISTORY — BUDDHISM, CIVILIZATION & ECOLOGY

Spanish-American philosopher George Santayana (1863-1952) once made the now-famous observation that “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” In a recent work entitled *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (New York: Penguin, 2005), renowned biogeographer Jared Diamond analyzes a number of diverse cases in which human civilizations have collapsed (largely) as a result of environmental degradation. In a chapter called “Why Do Some Societies Make Disastrous Decisions?” (available on Blackboard), Diamond attempts to work out in specific fashion the causes and conditions that seem to lead even great civilizations to shoot themselves in the foot, environmentally-speaking. I would like you to summarize the main points of Diamond’s argument, critically reflect upon it from your own knowledge and experience and, finally, bring Buddhist ideas and principles to bear upon Diamond’s thesis—e.g., the problem of ‘landscape amnesia’ vis-à-vis impermanence; the problem of ‘rational behavior’ in group decision making vis-à-vis emptiness/no-self. What ‘resources’ might Buddhism bring to the discussion of human beings’ relation to the environment, and, more generally, to human beings’ relation to their own past and future? What might it lack? (Please note Diamond’s single reference to the role of religion in social collapse on page 432). Please cite Diamond and at least one other source in developing your answer.

2. SCIENCE — BUDDHISM & EVOLUTION

Richard Dawkins, one of the world’s best-known (and most controversial) scientific writers, develops his interpretations of evolution in a number of popular works, including most recently a book entitled *The Ancestor’s Tale* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2004). In this work, Dawkins traces back our human family tree far beyond even our early hominid forebears, all the way back through our ape, monkey, lemur, shrew, reptile, fish, and ultimately single-celled ‘cousins’. In a chapter called “The Salamander’s Tale” (available on Blackboard), Dawkins discusses the often-passionate battles waged among scientists over names, developing a critique of what he calls “the tyranny of the discontinuous mind.” What does Dawkins mean by this phrase? Why does it pose a ‘problem’ in science? What are the more general implications of this idea beyond science? How may it relate to Buddhism? Read the Dawkins article carefully, and relate his argument to Buddhist ideas learned in this course or from the readings. Discuss briefly Dawkins’ concept of ‘extended phenotype’ with respect to Buddhist ideas of emptiness/no-self (note: this will require some research beyond the chapter from *The Ancestor’s Tale*). Finally, discuss the connection between Buddhism and the more general theory of evolution, as understood by most contemporary biologists. Where do Buddhism and evolution correlate? Where do they diverge? Be as specific as possible.

3. POLITICS — A BUDDHIST RESPONSE TO TERRORISM?

September 11, 2001 will remain etched in many people's minds as a watershed event in recent world history. The many issues raised and consolidated by the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and the volatile events that followed are crucial to any self-conscious attempt to build a better or more peaceful world, and cast particular light on the place of religion in such a future world. Buddhism, as a world religion of significant power and prestige, must shoulder some of the responsibility in future discussions about such matters. Reflect personally and critically upon at least one specific issue raised by the events of 9/11. For example: 'terrorism'; politics and religion; overcoming injustices; religious violence; holy war; US power and position; views of America by foreigners and in Middle East; the notion of an 'axis of evil'; the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq; Israel-Palestine; revenge; 'just war'; prospects for 'world peace'. Please utilize Buddhist ideas and/or values to analyze whatever issue(s) you choose. This can be done either positively (i.e., how thinking or acting 'Buddhistically' might be of benefit) or negatively (i.e., what Buddhism might lack with respect to dealing with one or another issue). You may use whatever sources you wish, but you must make explicit reference to David Loy's article, "Getting Beyond Good vs. Evil: A Buddhist Reflection on the New Holy War" (available on eres). Do you agree or disagree with Loy's argument? Why or why not? Be specific.

4. ETHICS — THE BODHISATTVA IDEAL

The figure of the bodhisattva is central to the Mahayana streams of Buddhist tradition. On the cosmological and devotional level, a number of bodhisattvas figure prominently in Mahayana Buddhist cultures: Mañjushri, Avalokiteshvara-Guanyin-Kannon, Kshitigarbha-Jizo, and Tara being some of the most popular. On the ethical level, the bodhisattva ideal is also foundational to the Mahayana emphasis on Great Compassion, and, as is evident in the writings of Shantideva, connects strongly with doctrines of interdependence, emptiness, no-self, and Buddha-nature. Yet there are those who might question the actual relevance of 'bodhisattvas' to our contemporary secular world, arguing that the cosmology is too superstitious to be helpful to most people and the ethical implications simply too vague or simplistic to be useful in dealing with the complex issues of our times. Please reflect personally and critically upon the following extraordinarily large question: *Why be good?* In trying to answer this question, I would like you to use not only your own experience and education but also specifically Buddhist ideals and doctrines, especially but not exclusively the bodhisattva ideal. Once you have finished these general reflections, please answer the following specific questions as concisely as possible, making reference to the reading by Dan Leighton on "The Bodhisattva Ideal" (on Blackboard):

- 1) Is the bodhisattva ideal a useful one, and if so, in what specific ways?
- 2) Do you think there are any problems with or limits to the bodhisattva ideal?
- 3) Should a bodhisattva make 'calculations' regarding suffering? Explain.
- 4) Do you know any people (or beings, real or imaginary, past or present) who might qualify as bodhisattvas? Identify and explain.

5. POETRY — RILKE & BUDDHISM ON THE MEANING OF LIFE

Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926) is one of the greatest lyric poets of the twentieth century. His poems are often classified as being connected with the 'existentialist' movement in philosophy, and had a significant impact on the philosophical work of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). Rather than have you struggle through one of Heidegger's ponderous tomes, I am providing you with a short (80-line) poem by Rilke entitled *Die Neunte Elegie* ('The Ninth Elegy'), taken from a longer series of poems called *Duino Elegies*, which draws together a number of his most significant themes. What does Rilke's poem have to do with Buddhism? That is what I'd like you to *discover*—or *invent*, since interpretation is always a bit of both. Go through the entire poem carefully, and interpret it 'Buddhistically', picking up any and all themes that relate to any of the Buddhist ideas raised throughout the course or in any of your readings. Also be sure to note any themes or ideas that do not, to your mind, correlate with Buddhism.

The Ninth Elegy

Why, if this interval of being can be spent serenely
in the form of a laurel, slightly darker than all
other green, with tiny waves on the edges
of every leaf (like the smile of a breeze)--: why then
have to be human--and, escaping from fate,
keep longing for fate?...

Oh **not** because happiness **exists**,
that too-hasty profit snatched from approaching loss.
Not out of curiosity, not as practice for the heart, which
would exist in the laurel too....

But because **truly** being here is so much; because everything here
apparently needs us, this fleeting world, which in some strange
way
keeps calling to us. Us, the most fleeting of all.
Once for each thing. Just once; no more. And we too,
just once. And never again. But to have been
this once, completely, even if only once:
to have been at one with the earth, seems beyond undoing.

And so we keep pressing on, trying to achieve it,
trying to hold it firmly in our simple hands,
in our overcrowded gaze, in our speechless heart.
Trying to become it.--Whom can we give it to? We would
hold on to it all, forever... Ah, but what can we take along
into that other realm? Not the art of looking,
which is learned so slowly, and nothing that happened here.
Nothing.

The sufferings then. And, above all, the heaviness,
and the long experience of love,--just what is wholly
unsayable. But later, among the stars,
what good is it--**they** are **better** as they are: unsayable.

For when the traveler returns from the mountain-slopes into the
valley,
he brings, not a handful of earth, unsayable to others, but instead
some word he has gained, some pure word, the yellow and blue
gentian. Perhaps we are **here** in order to say: house,
bridge, fountain, gate, pitcher, fruit-tree, window--
at most: column, tower... But to **say** them, you must
understand, oh to say them **more** intensely than the Things
themselves ever dreamed of existing. Isn't the secret intent
of this taciturn earth, when it forces lovers together,
that inside their boundless emotion all things may shudder with
joy?

Threshold: what it means for two lovers to be wearing down,
imperceptibly, the ancient threshold of their door--
they too, after the many who came before them
and before those to come... , lightly.

Here is the time for the **sayable**, **here** is its homeland.
Speak and bear witness. More than ever
the Things that we might experience are vanishing, for
what crowds them out and replaces them is an imageless act.
An act under a shell, which easily cracks open as soon as
the business inside outgrows it and seeks new limits.
Between the hammers our heart
endures, just as the tongue does
between the teeth and, despite that,
still is able to praise.

Praise this world to the angel, not the unsayable one,
you can't impress **him** with glorious emotion; in the universe
where he feels more powerfully, you are a novice. So show him
something simple which, formed over generations,
lives as our own, near our hand and within our gaze.
Tell him of Things.

He will stand astonished; as **you** stood
by the rope-maker in Rome or the potter along the Nile.
Show him how happy a Thing can be, how innocent and ours,
how even lamenting grief purely decides to take form,
serves as a Thing, or dies into a Thing--, and blissfully
escapes far beyond the violin.--And these Things,
which live by perishing, know you are praising them; transient,
they look to us for deliverance: us, the most transient of all.
They want us to change them, utterly, in our invisible heart,
within--oh endlessly--within us! Whoever we may be at last.

Earth, isn't this what you want: to arise within us,
invisible? Isn't it your dream
to be wholly invisible someday?--O Earth: invisible!
What, if not transformation, is your urgent command?
Earth, my dearest, I will. Oh, believe me, you no longer
need your springtimes to win me over--one of them,
ah, even one, is already too much for my blood.
Unspeakingly I have belonged to you, from the first.
You were always right, and your holiest inspiration
is our intimate companion, Death.

Look, I am living. On what? Neither childhood nor future
grows any smaller... Superabundant being
wells up in my heart.

6. PHILOSOPHY — A (BUDDHIST) WORLD WITHOUT ESSENCES?

Until his death last year (2007), Richard Rorty was one of America's, if not the world's, greatest living philosophers. As the proponent of a distinctly American-inspired school called "pragmatism" or "neopragmatism," Rorty attempted to revive what he believed was a more direct and common sense way of approaching the world derived from American thinkers such as William James and John Dewey, but also inspired by various poets, novelists and scientists. In the best Socratic tradition, Rorty was a "gadfly" among his fellow philosophers, causing trouble by rejecting the grand aims of traditional metaphysics and ontology in favor of a more limited view of the philosophical project as a way of clearing up what we mean when we speak, and to some extent supporting political movements for liberation. I am providing you with a short piece from a work called *Philosophy and Social Hope* (Penguin, 1999), a book Rorty intended for popular audiences. The article is entitled "A World Without Substances or Essences," and is a summary of Rorty's lifelong attempt to reframe Western thought in a non-essentialist and anti-foundational manner. Read the piece carefully, with an eye to what is or is not "Buddhist" about Rorty's approach? Could Buddhists in general or of particular sects support Rorty's version of pragmatism as anti-essentialism? Why or why not? Try to be as specific as possible, making reference to readings or texts such as the *Dhammapada*, *Heart of Understanding*, or *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*.

It was great to have you all in the course this semester. May you, along with all other sentient beings, be happy! And don't forget, things are always changing...

JMS

