

RELS-354: Buddhism: Its Development and Interpretation

Spring 2020 • Manhattan College

Section 01: TF 11:00–12:15pm • Miguel Hall 216

Section 02: TF 12:30–1:45pm • Miguel Hall 214

Instructor: William McGrath

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Office: Memorial Hall 424

Office Hours: MWR 2:30–3:20pm, or by appointment

Course Overview

This course is a general introduction to Buddhism, beginning with its scriptures, continuing with Buddhist transformations in East Asia, and concluding with mindfulness practices in the modern world. The course will examine the historical and cultural contexts in which Buddhist beliefs and practices developed, as well as the ways in which they are still developing today. We will read translations of scriptures attributed to the Buddha, the treatises of Buddhist practitioners, and the analyses of modern scholars. By completing this course students will become familiar with the historical development, major institutions, and major movements in the different types of Buddhism found throughout the world.

Course Objectives

1. Religion in Context: We will analyze Buddhism within the context of its cultural settings and historical developments.
2. Theories and Methods: We will assess sources and comparative methods in the academic study of religion, gaining critical awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of methods in the academic study of religion.
3. Critical Reflections on Tradition: We will appraise and critically reflect on the key ideas, practices, material culture, and social structures in Buddhist traditions.
4. Contemporary Relevance: We will also evaluate the concepts and terminology of Buddhism within the context of contemporary life (such as art, politics, class, gender, law, ethics, and so forth), especially in the contexts of Zen and mindfulness in the modern world.

Attendance

Students are expected to attend each class session. You are allowed three absences (for any reason) without penalty; absences for athletics are included in these three. Beginning on your fourth absence, your course grade will be reduced by 1/3 of a letter-grade (e.g. B+, B, B-) per absence. On your 9th absence, you will automatically fail the course. If you do not show up for class, my assumption is that you are deliberately making the choice not to attend, and that you understand the attendance policy. I will not hunt you down and remind you to come to class.

Deadlines

Missing deadlines will affect your grade. Late work will be penalized 5 points per day. If you do not turn in an assignment, I will not chase you around and pester you to turn it in. My assumption is that you are aware of the due dates and are choosing not to turn it in.

Participation

Please complete the assigned readings for each day before you come to class. Bring the readings to class and be prepared to discuss them. Be an active reader! Take notes when you read. Pay attention to the genre and time period of the reading, as well as to the author's argument. Who is the audience for the reading? Is the author persuasive?

Citations and Plagiarism

You will be expected to cite the course readings in your work, but please ask me before you cite outside works (websites and other books). Plagiarism should be understood as taking someone else's work or ideas and passing them off as one's own, and it will not be tolerated in this course. For more information on plagiarism and its consequences, see [<inside.manhattan.edu/student-life/dean-of-students/code-conduct.php#violationsintegrity>](http://inside.manhattan.edu/student-life/dean-of-students/code-conduct.php#violationsintegrity).

Grades

The grading scale for this class is: A = 100–93, A- = 92–90, B+ = 89–88, B = 87–83, B- = 82–80, C+ = 79–78, C = 77–73, C- = 72–70, D+ = 69–68, D = 67–63, D- = 62–60. In this course, a “B” means: “Good.” Grades above this reflect performance where a student brings a greater degree of creativity, accuracy, insight, energy, and inquiry to the material. Grades below this reflect poorer performance. Note that you must complete all assignments to pass the course (i.e. you cannot decide to skip some of the assignments). Below are the assignments that will make up your final grade:

1. Participation (15% of total grade): The success of this class depends on your active participation. You are expected to be prepared and to participate in discussion. What I am looking for is critical, accurate, creative, and otherwise thoughtful engagement with the course materials. You are not required to be the loudest person in class. However, you should have prepared for class so that you are able to discuss the materials and ask questions.

2. Reading Response (10% of final grade): In addition to critically discussing the readings in class, you will also be expected to compose one short reading response (RR). The RR will be a 500-word response (approximately 2 double-spaced pages) to a prompt that can be found on Moodle. The RR is designed to give you space to read carefully, think critically, and compose a short analysis or argument regarding what you have read. The RR should be typed, printed, and turned in at the beginning of class (see schedule below).

3. Exams (50% of final grade; 25% each): Three exams make up over half of your grade:

- **Midterm Exam One:** February 21st, covering the material in Part One of the course.
- **Midterm Exam Two:** March 27th, covering the material in Part Two of the course.

4. Term Paper (25% of final grade): The term paper will be a longer analytical essay about mindfulness in America. You should carefully read *Why Buddhism Is True* and selections from *McMindfulness*, think about them critically, organize your thoughts, and compose a 1250-word essay (approximately five double-spaced pages). The essay should reflect understanding of the literature, as well as critical insights that derive from class discussions we have had throughout the semester. I will be available to work with you on your thesis and outline, and your final draft will be due on May 9th.

Required Books

You are required to buy one copy of each of these books. They are available both at the bookstore and online:

Morinaga, Soko. *Novice to Master: An Ongoing Lesson in the Extent of My Own Stupidity*. Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2004.

Wright, Robert. *Why Buddhism is True: The Science and Philosophy of Meditation and Enlightenment*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2017.

Articles and Selections

These readings are posted on the course Moodle site:

Keown, Damien. *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Lopez, Donald S., Jr. *Buddhist Scriptures*. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2004.

“Karma Tales” (pp. 24–33); “A Lesson from a Ghost” (34–36); “A Scripture That Protects Kings” (37–45); “Why the Buddha Had Good Digestion” (136–41); “A King Gives away His Head” (142–58); “Rūpyāvatī Gives away Her Breasts” (159–71); “Making Men into Monks” (230–51); “A Murderer Becomes a Monk” (252–61); “Monks in the Mahāyāna” (269–77); “Makings New Monastic Rules” (278–84); “Lives of Eminent Monks and Nuns” (285–96); “Taking the *Vinaya* Across the Sea” (306–17); “Zen for National Defence” (318–328); “How a Monk Freed His Mother from Hell” (329–34); “The Perfection of Wisdom” (450–63); “In Praise of Reality” (464–77); “The Practice of No Thought” (504–12); “Finding Enlightenment in the Final Age” (513–21); “The Gift of Faith” (522–30)

Purser, Ronald E. *McMindfulness: How Mindfulness Became the New Capitalist Spirituality*. London: Repeater Books, 2019.

Walters, Jonathan S. “Gotamī’s Story.” In *Buddhism in Practice*, edited by Donald S. Lopez, Jr., 113–38. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995.

Part One: The Three Jewels in Buddhist Scriptures

Week 1: The Buddha

Tuesday (1/14): Introductions

Friday (1/17): The Buddha

Keown, *Buddhism*, 1–28.

Week 2: The Buddha

Tuesday (1/21): No Class (Monday Sched.)

Friday (1/24): Jataka Tales

Lopez, ed., *Buddhist Scriptures*, 136–71.

Week 3: Early Buddhism

Tuesday (1/28): The Dharma

Keown, *Buddhism*, 29–56.

Friday (1/31): Karma and Protection

Lopez, ed., *Buddhist Scriptures*, 24–45.

Week 4: Later Buddhism

Tuesday (2/4): Mahayana

Keown, *Buddhism*, 57–69.

Friday (2/7): The Perfection of Wisdom

Lopez, ed., *Buddhist Scriptures*, 450–77.

RR due at the beginning of class.

Week 5: The Sangha

Tuesday (2/11): Early Monks

Lopez, ed., *Buddhist Scriptures*, 230–61.

Friday (2/14): Later Monks and Nuns

Lopez, ed., *Buddhist Scriptures*, 269–96.

Week 6: The Sangha

Tuesday (2/18): A Female Buddha

Walters, “Gotamī’s Story,” 113–38.

Friday (2/21): **Midterm Exam One**

Part Two: Zen and Buddhism in East Asia

Week 7: Buddhism in East Asia

Tuesday (2/25): Beyond South Asia

Keown, *Buddhism*, 70–83.

Friday (2/28): Buddhism in Japan

Lopez, ed., *Buddhist Scriptures*, 306–34.

Week 8: Early Zen

Tuesday (3/3): No Thought

Lopez, ed., *Buddhist Scriptures*, 504–30.

Friday (3/6): Novice

Morinaga, *Novice to Master*, 11–36.

Week 9: Modern Zen (Coronavirus in NY)

Tuesday (3/10): Training (canceled)

Morinaga, *Novice to Master*, 37–78.

Friday (3/13): Master (prerecorded lecture)

Morinaga, *Novice to Master*, 81–108.

Week 10: Spring Break (No Class)

Tuesday (3/17): Spring Break (No Class)

Friday (3/20): Spring Break (No Class)

Read Morinaga, *Novice to Master*.

Week 11: Modern Zen

Tuesday (3/24): Enlightenment and Death

Morinaga, *Novice to Master*, 111–154.

[Zoom discussion]

Friday (3/27): **Midterm Exam Two**

[Online exam]

Part Three: Meditation and Buddhism in America

[Online Classes Due to the Coronavirus]

Our course will be online for the rest of the semester. In order to allow for maximum flexibility while also having face-to-face discussion, we will shift to a combination of prerecorded lectures and Zoom discussions (both of which will involve slides). Participation grades will be evaluated using Moodle forums for the prerecorded lectures, and participation in the Zoom discussions. I will also record the Zoom discussions and post them to Moodle for those that are not able to attend. Your final paper will still be a five-page analysis of *Why Buddhism Is True*.

Week 12: Mindfulness

Tuesday (3/31): Meditation

Wright, *Why Buddhism is True*, 1–26.

[Zoom discussion]

Friday (4/3): Meditation

Wright, *Why Buddhism is True*, 27–57.

[Prerecorded lecture]

Week 13: A Critique of Mindfulness

Tuesday (4/7): McMindfulness

Purser, *McMindfulness*, 7–24.

[Zoom discussion]

Friday (4/10): Easter Holiday

Read Wright, *Why Buddhism is True*.

[No class]

Week 14: Buddhism in America

Tuesday (4/14): Buddhist Philosophy

Wright, *Why Buddhism is True*, 58–120.

[Prerecorded lecture]

Friday (4/17): Buddhist Philosophy

Wright, *Why Buddhism is True*, 121–52.

[Zoom discussion]

Week 15: Buddhism in America

Tuesday (4/21): Buddhist Practice

Wright, *Why Buddhism is True*, 153–92.

[Prerecorded lecture]

Friday (4/24): Buddhist Practice

Wright, *Why Buddhism is True*, 193–224.

[Zoom discussion]

**Extra-credit assignment due at
beginning of class**

Week 16: Buddhism in America

Tuesday (4/28): Enlightenment

Wright, *Why Buddhism is True*, 225–66.

[Prerecorded lecture]

Friday (5/1): Mindfulness Looking Forward

Purser, *McMindfulness*, 241–62.

[Zoom discussion]

Term Paper Due Thursday (5/9)