

Buddhism in India: Topical Outline

Buddhism defines itself as a path to liberation; nothing more, nothing less. The Buddha described this path as combination of moral training, meditative discipline, and wisdom, culminating in the acquisition of a special type of knowledge that sets one free from an endless cycle of everyday existence, an existence he termed fundamentally flawed, *duḥkha*, “suffering.”

In the centuries following the death of the Buddha (c. 400 BCE?) Buddhist thinkers in India would explore what they took as his original teachings and elaborate upon them in fascinating and diverse ways. Although we have only a few short hours to do so, we will attempt to survey the key elements of Indian Buddhist thought. The class will roughly follow the outline below:

Indian Thought at the Time of the Buddha	Abhidharma: The Technical Analysis of Experience
Ātman and Brahman	
Transmigration and Deliverance	Buddhist Cosmology: The Geography of Saṃsāra
The Renunciant	
Buddha	The Spread of the Dharma
The Life of the Buddha as History and Myth	The Emperor Aśoka
The Nature of Buddhahood	Buddhism in Gandhāra
Dharma: The Teachings of the Buddha	The Rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism
Early Buddhist Scripture	The Perfection of Wisdom Literature
Suffering and its Origin; Emancipation and the Path; Nirvāṇa	Madhyamaka: The “Middle Way”
Karma and the Causal Chain of Birth and Death	Development of the Mahāyāna Tradition
Buddhist Meditation	Important Scriptures
Samgha: The Buddhist Community	The Bodhisattva Path
Monastic Rules	The Bodies of the Buddha
The Early Buddhist Schools	Celestial Buddhas and Bodhisattvas
The Lay Community	Yogācāra: “Representation Only”
	The Imagination of the Unreal
	Tathāgatagarbha: The “Womb of the Tathāgathas”
	Tantra: “Esoteric” Buddhism*

Selected readings and a helpful GLOSSARY OF TECHNICAL TERMS (highly recommended!) are available in the repository created for this class: <https://github.com/mcummingsny/Indian-Buddhism>.

There is no login or password required to download these materials.

* Time permitting!