

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. 404 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 and, hopefully, understand, the key elements of Indian Buddhist thought. The class will roughly follow the outline below:

Indian Thought at the Time of the Buddha

- Ātman and Brahman

- Transmigration and Deliverance

- The Renunciant

Buddha

- The Life of the Buddha as History and Myth

- The Nature of Buddhahood

Dharma: The Teachings of the Buddha

- Early Buddhist Scripture

- Suffering and its Origin; Emancipation and the Path

- Karma and the Causal Chain of Birth and Death

- The Role of Meditation

Samgha: The Buddhist Community

- Monastic Rules

- Lay versus Clerical Practice

The Early Buddhist Schools

- Abhidharma: The Technical Analysis of Experience

- Buddhist Cosmology: The Geography of Saṃsāra

- The Spread of the Dharma

- The Emperor Aśoka

- Buddhism in Gandhāra

The Rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism

- The Perfection of Wisdom Literature

- The Bodhisattva Path

- Celestial Buddhas and Bodhisattvas

The Major Mahāyāna Traditions

- Madhyamaka: The “Middle Way”

- Yogācāra: “Representation Only”

- Tathāgatagarbha: The “Womb of the Tathāgathas”

- Tantra: “Esoteric” Buddhism

Selected readings and a helpful GLOSSARY OF TECHNICAL TERMS 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.