

Humanities 6: Great People, Great Ages

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Fall 2002

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Hrs: MW 4-5:30, Th 6-8 or call for appt

COURSE DESCRIPTION: *General description:* An interdisciplinary course which covers leading figures and major cultural developments in an historical period, such as the Greek playwrights and 5th century Athens; Jesus, the New Testament, and the Emergence of Christianity; Augustine and the Augustinian Age; Muhammad and the Rise of Islam; Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo and the Renaissance; Descartes to Kant and the Enlightenment; Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche and the 19th century, Heidegger and the 20th Century, etc.. The course can also focus on a major development or issue of a particular period, such as the problem of truth and the sacred as it developed in the 19th-20th centuries or the transition from modernism to postmodernism.

Title and Description of Fall 2002 course: Siddhartha Gautama and the Devevelopment of Buddhism

Buddhism is one of the World's great religions. It began in India the sixth century BCE with the breakthrough experience (Nirvana) of Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, (the Enlightened One) and became the center of a major cultural development from the 3rd century BCE in India. Buddhism in its various forms spread to Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, China, Tibet, Korea, Japan, and most recently to the so-called West (USA, Europe, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, etc.) It has had a lasting and major impact in all these areas, but ironically least of all in its place of birth. This was due partly to the absorption of its influence by developments within Hinduism and finally the wholesale slaughter of Buddhists and destruction of virtually all of the thousands of Buddhist temples when the Islamic invasions of India took place between the ninth and eleventh centuries.

The fact that there has never been a Buddhist war says a great deal about Buddhism. At its core it is a religion of compassion for the suffering of all sentient beings that does not insist on any doctrinal "truth." "The sacred" is not merely believed in, but experienced and lived. It is a religion of direct experience open to each individual aided by reflection and insight that does not aim at any abstract metaphysical truth, but is used to undermine the many misconceptions that prevent us from liberation from ignorance and from experiencing the sacred. Although it has taken on the cultural trappings of many different places that make it appear as confusingly diverse as Christianity, this essential core is present in all forms of Buddhism. Nirvana is the Sanskrit term used to name this state of enlightened well being and deep compassion. It is not a place or some kind of escape from reality, but a state of mind in which one's relation to everything is no longer driven by ego needs and in which one lives fully in the world. Buddhism is the cultivation of awareness of our human condition at its core, the awareness of our vulnerability and fallibility that is liberating and allows a transformation in consciousness in which kindness and compassion naturally arise. Siddhartha Gautama's discovery of the middle path between the excesses of asceticism and hedonism as most conducive to this state and his formulation of steps each of us can take in our lives to achieve this level of equanimity and insight (the Four Noble Truths and The Eightfold Path) provide immediate, practical, non metaphysical guidance for any individual who desires to become truly a better, happier, more loving person.

In this course we will attempt to discern something of the personality of this extraordinary person referred to as the Buddha. In addition, we will retrace the development and influence of the various forms of Buddhism and their spread to many places. Finally, we will attempt to understand the nature or essence of this religion/philosophy/way of life. It simply is impossible to understand the world we live in or make any justified claim to being an educated person without some knowledge of these.

- Note:** 1. If you drop the class, do so officially or you may receive an automatic F for the course.
2. If work is not completed by the end of the semester a grade will be given which can be changed within 2 years.
3. You are subject to automatic exclusion if you miss 2 weeks of class.
4. If you come to class late or leave early, please sit in the rear of the class. Seats there should be otherwise left empty.
5. **Beepers and cell phones** should be turned off before entering class.
6. Please see me first for help or complaints.
7. This outline is a basic guide and is subject to revision. Follow announcements in class about any changes.

- TEXTS:** 1. Armstrong, Karen. *Buddha*. Viking, 2001. (KA)
2. Nanamoli, Bhikkhu, *The Life of the Buddha*. Buddhist Publication Society, 1972.1992 (BN)
3. Robinson, Richard H. *Buddhist Religion: A Historical Introduction*. Wadsworth, 1997. (RR)
4. One or two other texts to be announced

Check **Website:** www.shinzen.org for information and discussions on Buddhist Vipassana meditation

GRADING: 1) One or two essay exams of several essays: each essay 3-5 standard typed pages, 100 pts. each. 2) A journal of collected favorite passages from your reading briefly saying why each passage both represents a major issue raised in the text and was particularly meaningful for you. Late journals and exams are not graded until the end of the semester. Thoughtful, informed class participation and perfect or near perfect attendance may raise the grade.

| Date | Topic | Reading |
|---|----------------------------|----------------|
| 9/5 | Introduction | |
| 9/12 | Life of Siddhartha Gautama | KA pp 1-98 |
| 9/19 | Life of Siddhartha Gautama | KA pp. 98-188 |
| 9/26 | Life of Siddhartha Gautama | BN Intro Ch1-6 |
| 10/3 | Life of Siddhartha Gautama | BN Ch 7-11 |
| FIRST JOURNALS DUE 10/10 | | |
| 10/10 | Life of Siddhartha Gautama | BN Ch 12-16 |
| 10/17-31 | History of Buddhism | RR |
| FIRST ESSAYS DUE 11/7 | | |
| 11/7 | History of Buddhism | RR |
| 11/14-21 | The Meaning of Buddhism | TBA |
| 11/28 | No Class | |
| 12/5-12 | The Meaning of Buddhism | TBA |
| 12/19 | Final Discussion | |
| FINAL ESSAYS AND JOURNALS DUE on or before 12/19 | | |