Minor in Buddhist Studies Programme

Centre of Buddhist Studies, The University of Hong Kong

BSTC2006 Buddhist Psychology and Mental Cultivation (6 Credits)
(The course is open to students from all faculties as a free elective)

Offering Semester: 1st Semester of 2018/2019
Day of the week: Tuesday 1:30 pm – 3:20 pm
Class dates: Sep. 4, 11, 18; Oct. 2, 9, 23, 30; Nov. 6, 13, 20, 27
Venue: RHT
Lecturer: Dr. G.A. Somaratne
Email: soma@hku.hk
Office: Room 408, 4/F, Jockey Club Tower, Centre of Buddhist Studies
Tel: 3917-5076

Course Description (6 credits)
In this course, we will examine Buddhist discourses on the nature and operation of the mind. We will study basic Buddhist principles and diverse practices of mental cultivation based on ancient Buddhist texts and manuals that present unique perspectives on individual, family, and society at large and world. The main topics covered in this course include psychology of dhamma and the theory of “dependent co-arising”, relation between mind and body, sensory perception and obsession, intentional actions and human wellbeing, positive thinking and self-initiative, controlling emotions and mindfulness practice, selfless being and awakened mind.

Objectives
At the end of this course, students are expected to develop the ability to:

1. Explain the Buddhist teachings regarding the nature and operation of the mind.
2. Identify basic Buddhist principles, meditation practices and personality types.
3. Analyze the principles in which these diverse Buddhist meditation practices cater to different personality types.
4. Relate Buddhist ideas and principles in understanding and finding perpetual solutions to complex psychological, social, political and environmental issues in the modern world.
5. Develop an appreciative and positive attitude towards one’s life, family, society and the world.

Lecture Topics

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Lecture</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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| Sep. 4 | 1 | Dhamma and Psychology  
*Why is it important to develop right view in the pursuit of well-being and happiness of our own and others? What are the obstacles for developing right view? Why is it important to study the Buddha’s teaching as a form of psychology? How should we view and study the Buddhist scriptures in such a way that our studies edify or make us better people? What is the difference between understanding the teaching and experiencing it? Why understanding of the teaching is important? Can the arising of suffering and the cessation of suffering be understood and experienced through objective methods?*
| Sep. 11 | 2 | Theory of Dependent Co-arising  
*What is unique about this causation theory of Dependent Co-arising? What is the significance of this*
<table>
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<td>Sep. 18</td>
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<td>Intentional action, positive thinking, and self-initiative</td>
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<td>Oct. 2</td>
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<td>Problem of ‘my self’</td>
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<td>Oct. 9</td>
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<td>Psychological analysis of social conflicts</td>
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<td>Oct. 30</td>
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<td>Name-and-Matter and Consciousness</td>
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**theory for understanding our psychological phenomena? How does the standard formulation of Dependent Co-arising present the arising of our present suffering? How does it present the possibility that this arising could be stopped?**

**Sep. 18**

**Intentional action, positive thinking, and self-initiative**

Why does the Buddha identify intention to be kamma? Can mere thinking take us to our desired goals? What is the role of human effort and self-initiative in achieving our desired goals? What is the nature of the correlation between action and its result?

**Oct. 2**

**Problem of ‘my self’**

Why does the worldly person perceive ‘self’ as self and cling to a belief in self rather than to a self? Why does the noble disciple see ‘self’ as ‘self’? How do all experiences of the worldly person turn into be ‘personal experiences’? How does conceit ‘I am’ become the base for the belief in self? How does the Buddhist theory of not-self differ from the theory of no self of rationalism or materialism? Why is self always an ambiguity to the worldly person? How does this ambiguity cause anxiety and worry to him/her?

**Oct. 9**

**Psychological analysis of social conflicts**

What are the psychological roots of conflict? How do the mental tendencies such as lust, greed, hate, jealousy, and stinginess function as determinants of mental agitation? How does mental agitation take us to verbal dispute and violent conflict? What does it mean to understand a conflict fully? What are the Buddhist methods of understanding a conflict fully? What are the models of conflict resolution presented in the Buddha’s teaching? Are these models appropriate for resolving conflicts in today’s world?

**Oct. 23**

**Problem of Suicide**

In what sense our very being/existence is being ‘I’ or being ‘self’? What is the connection between craving for ‘being’ and craving for ‘unbeing’? Can the worldly person stop craving for ‘unbeing’ by intensifying sensual pleasure in the present ‘being’? Why do people commit suicide? How does ‘unbeing’ re-create ‘being’? Why is ‘unbeing’ a furthering of suffering, rather than an escape from suffering? What is ‘cessation of being’? How does it resolve the conflict between ‘being’ and ‘unbeing’?

**Oct. 30**

**Name-and-Matter and Consciousness**

What is the Buddhist theory of mind? How does the mind work? What do the terms viññāṇa, citta, manas, and nāma mean? What do we mean by ‘experience’? What do we experience? Is it mind and matter or is it name-and-matter? What is the role of consciousness in experience? What are the physical and psychological factors involved in an experience? Why does experience produce mental unpleasant feelings?

**Nov. 6**

**Sensory perception and obsession**

How do I experience ‘my world’? How do I know ‘I exist’? Can ‘I exist’ without being aware of a world? In my experience, what do I experience first, being conscious of an ‘I’ or being conscious of the things present around me? Can the reflexive experience take place without an ‘I’? Why is ‘I’ considered to be a parasite in the structure of reflexive experience? How could this parasite be removed? Once removed, how does the structure of reflexive experience work? Why does sense experience leads to obsession and suffering? How could this leading to obsession and suffering be stopped?
### Controlling emotions and dealing with defilements

*What are defilements? Why do they appear in clusters and groups? What is the relationship between motives and conduct? How does one’s conduct define one’s present character and future destiny? What are the methods for curbing defilements? Why are there many methods?*

### Mindfulness practice and working with memory

*What is the difference between reflection and reflexion? Why does the Buddha’s teaching promote the practice of right mindfulness? What are the four approaches to the setting up of right mindfulness? What is the connection between mindfulness and memory? How does mindfulness help remembering things as they really are?*

### Personality types and meditation techniques

*Why does the Buddha’s teaching classify personality/character types into six? How can we identify each personality type? What is the connection between the meditation subjects and the personality types? Is there any other use of identifying personality types? Are they useful for human resource management?*

### Assessment

100% coursework with the following breakdowns:

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<th>Assessment Tasks</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Quiz 1 (from the lecture notes 2, 3, 4) – Date: Oct. 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Quiz 2 (from the lecture notes 5, 6, 7) – Date: Oct. 30</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Quiz 3 (from the lecture notes 8,9,10,11) – Date: Nov. 27</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Reflective Writing 1 based on a concept learned from Lectures 1 to 6 (1500 words) – Due Date: Oct. 30</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Reflective Writing 2 based on a concept learned from Lectures 7 to 12 (1500 words) – Due Date: Dec. 4</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<td>6. Attendance and participation</td>
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**Note:**

- All written assignments are to be submitted by uploading onto Moodle prior to 23:50 of the due date, late submission will be subjected to mark deduction. Files must be renamed as “LASTNAME First name”, e.g., “LEUNG Chi Wai Tony”. A printed copy of each assignment must also be handed over to the class instructor.

**General expectation of student performance at the various grades:**


**Quizzes**

- There will be THREE in-class quizzes. They are designed to check the student’s ability to recall, identify and briefly define the basic concepts discussed in the lectures and lecture notes.
What is reflective writing?

- Reflective writing is evidence of reflective thinking. In this reflective thinking, you will look back at an idea, concept, or theory learned in the course and see its relevance to analyze one of your unforgettable personal experiences in the past or a social issue that you have been interested in. You will analyze the experience or the issue that you choose, thinking in depth and from an enlightened perspective. You will try to explain it in relation to a Buddhist concept, model or theory discussed in the course. You will think carefully about what the idea, concept, model or theory means for you and your ongoing progress as a learner.

- Reflective writing is more personal than other kinds of academic writing. We all think reflectively in everyday life, but perhaps not to the same depth as that is expected in a good piece of reflective writing at university level. Reflective writing can be unstructured, for example when it is done in a personal diary. What is expected for this assignment is a carefully-structured writing.

A possible structure for reflective writing

Reflective writing can be broken down into three parts:

- **Description**: What happened? What is being examined?
- **Interpretation**: What is most important / interesting / useful / relevant about the object, event, issue or idea? How can it be explained in relation to the Buddhist concept or theory?
- **Outcome**: What have I learned from this? What does this mean for my future?

This is just one way of structuring reflective writing. There are others. What is important is your own creativity. Whichever approach to reflection you use, try to bear in mind the following four key points:

- Reflection is an exploration and an explanation of events—not just a description of them.
- Reflective writing involves ‘revealing’ anxieties, errors and weaknesses, as well as strengths and successes. This is fine, if you show some understanding of possible causes, and explain how you plan to improve.
- It is necessary to select just the most significant parts of the event or idea on which you are reflecting. If you try to ‘tell the whole story’ you are likely to use up your words on description rather than interpretation.

[Please check the Moodle page of the course for some sample reflective writings.]

**Grading**

Grade for this reflective writing assignment will be decided based on creativity, clarity and organization of the presentation, accuracy in explaining or interpreting the Buddhist theory or concept, depth in reflection, and application of the concept to review and improve your personal life. References to sources outside the class lectures/lecture notes are not required.
**Recommended Reading List**

**Recommended Internet Resources**

1. An Entrance to the World of Buddhism [www.buddhistdoor.com]
2. Buddhism and Science [www.mindandlife.org]
4. Mindfulness teachers talks [www.dhammaseed.org]
5. Access to insight [www.accesstoinsight.org]
7. Translations of the Buddha’s discourses [http://suttacentral.net/]

Last update 18 July 2018