

Academic Year 2023-24

Semester 2

HKU

BSTC 2006 Buddhist Psychology and Mental Cultivation

(6 Credits)

(The course is open to students from all faculties as a free elective)

Course Teacher:

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Office: Room 4.08, 4/F, The Jockey Club Tower, Centennial Campus
Centre of Buddhist Studies

Class Day and Time: Tuesday 4:30 pm – 6:20 pm

Class Venue: WLGH

Class Days: (1) Jan 16, (2) Jan 23, (3) Jan 30,
(4) Feb 6, (5) Feb 20, (6) Feb 27
(7) Mar 12, (8) Mar 19, (9) Mar 26
(10) Apr 2, (11) Apr 9, (12) Apr 16, (13) Apr 23

[No tutorial classes]

Course Description

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.

Course Objectives

The course aims at training the students to:

- Learn the Buddha’s basic teachings on mind and its operation accurately while developing an enquiring mind within oneself
- Learn to live a positive life while appreciating one’s own life and the lives of others
- Look at the life and the world in a novel way “going against the currents” while developing interests in a conflict-free, stress-free, simple lifestyle
- Identify the Buddha’s psychological terms and concepts while relating them to daily life.

Course Learning Outcomes

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

- Explain the Buddhist teachings on the nature and operation of the mind
- Identify basic Buddhist psychological terms and concepts and relate them to understand one’s own life and the lives of others

- Explain the reason for the existence of diverse Buddhist meditation techniques and practices as to cater to different personality types
- Relate Buddhist ideas and principles in understanding and finding perpetual solutions to complex psychological, social, political and environmental issues in the modern world
- Develop an appreciative and positive attitude towards one's life, family, society, and the world.

Course Outline: Topic and Discussion Questions

Class 1 16 January 2024	Dhamma and Psychology	Syllabus discussion Lecture
<p>What is right view? How important is the right view in the pursuit of well-being and happiness of our own and others? What are the obstacles for developing right view? Why? What is psychology? Is the Buddha's teaching a form of psychology? Can the knowledge of the teaching make us better people? How? How should we study the Buddhist scriptures? What should be the method of study? Can the arising of suffering and the cessation of suffering be understood and experienced through externally driven objective methods?</p>		
Class 2 23 January 2024	Theory of Dependent Co-arising	Lecture Class activity
<p>What is unique about the Buddha's causation theory of Dependent Co-arising? What is the significance of this theory for understanding 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 of suffering could be stopped?</p>		
Class 3 30 January 2024	Human Effort and Self-Initiative in the Pursuit of Life Goals	Lecture Class activity
<p>What is intention? Why is intention a 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?</p>		
Class 4 6 February 2024	Problem of 'My Self'	Lecture Class activity
<p>How does self differ from 'my self'? Why do we cling to a belief in self rather than to a self? Who can see 'my self' as 'my self'? What make all experiences 'personal experiences'? Who is a 'person'? How does conceit 'I am' become the base for the belief in self? How does the Buddha's theory of not-self differ from the no self theory of rationalism or materialism? Why is self an ambiguity? How does this ambiguity cause anxiety and worry?</p>		
Class 5 20 February 2024	Psychological Analysis of Social Conflicts	Lecture Class activity

What are the psychological roots of conflict? How do the mental tendencies such as lust, greed, hate, jealousy, and stinginess function as causes of mental agitation? How does mental agitation develop into 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?

Class 6
27 February 2024

Problem of Suicide

Lecture
Quiz 1

In what sense our very being/existence is being 'I' or being 'my 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'?

Class 7
12 March 2024

Psychological Analysis of Human
Experience

Lecture

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?

17 March 2024 (Sunday) Due: Reflective Writing 1

Class 8
19 March 2024

Sensory Perception and Obsession

Lecture
Class activity

How do we experience 'my world'? How do we 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 lead to obsession and suffering? How could it be stopped?

Class 9
26 March 2024

Controlling Emotions and Dealing with
Defilements

Lecture
Class activity

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?

Class 10 2 April 2024	Mindfulness Practice and Working with Memory	Lecture Class activity
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 remember things as they really are?		
Class 11 9 April 2024	Personality Types and Meditation Techniques	Lecture Quiz 2
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?		
Class 12 16 April 2024	Positive Institutions and Positive Strengths	Lecture
What are the positive institutions that support our growth as individuals and social beings? How do family, democracy and free inquiry provide positive emotions and strengths to our growth as human beings? Can the family life of the laity and the monastic life of the Saṅgha be understood as positive institutions? How do these institutions function to enrich our positive strengths by guiding individuals to fulfil their duties towards each other and to enjoy full human rights in conformity with the Dhamma?		
Class 13 23 April 2024	[No class on this day but the day is reserved for any makeup class]	
28 April 2024 (Sunday) Due: Reflective writing 2		

Knowledge and Skills

Through the course assignments, the Buddhist Studies programme expects students not only learn the subject matter but also acquire some transferable skills such as:

- Write concisely and with clarity
- Effectively structure and communicate ideas
- Explore and assess a variety of sources for research purposes
- Make judgements involving the validity and cogency of arguments
- Develop self-reflexivity.

Assessment

100% coursework with the following breakdowns:

Assessment Tasks	Weighting
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1	Attendance and participation Class assignments	20%
2	Quiz 1 From: lecture notes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 Date: 27 February 2024	10%
2	Quiz 2 From: lecture notes 6, 7, 8, 9, 10) Date: 9 April 2024	10%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The two quizzes are designed to check the student's ability to recall, identify and briefly define the basic concepts discussed in the lectures and lecture notes. 		
4	Reflective Writing 1 based on a concept learned from Lectures 1 to 6 Word limit: 1500 words Due Date: 17 March 2024	30%
5	Reflective Writing 2 based on a concept learned from Lectures 7 to 11 Word limit: 1500 words Due Date: 28 April 2024	30%
What is reflective writing?		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 contemporary 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. <i>Reflective writing is more personal</i> than other kinds of academic writing. We all think reflectively in everyday life, but perhaps not to the same <i>depth</i> 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 <i>a carefully structured writing</i>. 		
A possible structure for reflective writing		
<p>Reflective writing can be broken down into three parts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Description</i>: What happened? What is being examined? <i>Interpretation</i>: 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 <i>theory</i>? <i>Outcome</i>: What have I learned from this? What does this mean for my future? <p>This is just one way of structuring a reflective writing. There are other ways. What is important is your own creativity. Whichever approach to reflection you use, try to bear in mind that reflection is an <i>exploration</i> and an <i>explanation</i> of events—not just a description of them; that reflective writing involves ‘<i>revealing</i>’ <i>anxieties, errors, and weaknesses</i>, as well as <i>strengths and successes</i>, together with showing your understanding of possible causes, and explaining how you plan to improve; and that it is necessary to select just the most <i>significant parts of the event or idea</i> on which you are reflecting for if you try to ‘tell the whole story’, you are likely to use up your words on description rather than interpretation.</p> <p>[Please check the Moodle page of the course for some sample reflective writings.]</p>		
Grading		

- Grade for the reflective writing assignments 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.

Your final Course Grade:

Please note that we will award assignment grades based on your meeting the requirements or required standards set by the course (that is what we consider that your assignment truly deserves). However, at the end of the course, if more than 35% students of the course were to receive A range grades as final course grades, in such occasion, we will apply a curve to limit the A range grades to 35% maximum. So working to your maximum ability is required to receive a higher grade in this course.

In addition, the course grading criteria take into account the details given in the following two university documents:

Faculty Grade Expectations: http://arts.hku.hk/grade_expectations.pdf

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a serious academic offence. The University upholds the principle that plagiarism in any form is unacceptable and any student found plagiarizing is liable to disciplinary action in addition to failing the assessment concerned. Please read the following webpage on "plagiarism" for details:

<http://arts.hku.hk/current-students/undergraduate/assessment/plagiarism>

A Note on how to submit your two written assignments

- The two 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".

Start your assignments early and submit them by the deadlines [No extension will be granted beyond the deadline except on strong medical ground].

Recommended Reading List

1. Analayo, Bhikkhu (2010) *Satipatthana: The Direct Path to Realization*. Cambridge: Windhorse Publications.
2. Bodhi, Bhikkhu (1993) *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.
3. Bodhi, Bhikkhu (2000) *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
4. Bodhi, Bhikkhu (2012) *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
5. Bronkhorst, Johannes (1998) *Two Traditions of Meditation in Ancient India*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
6. De Silva, Padmasiri (2014) *An Introduction to Buddhist Psychology and Counselling*. London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
7. Gethin, R.M.L. (2001) *The Buddhist Path to Awakening (Classics in Religious Studies)*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications.
8. Gethin, Rupert (1998) *The Foundations of Buddhism*. USA: Oxford University Press.

9. Govinda, Lama Anagarika (1961) *The Psychological Attitude of Early Buddhist Philosophy and Its Systematic Representation According to Abhidhamma Tradition*. London: Rider & Company.
10. Hart, W. (1987) *The Art of Living: Vipassana Meditation as taught by S.N. Goenka*. San Francisco: Harper.
11. Harvey, Peter (1995) *The Selfless Mind: Personality, Consciousness and Nirvana in Early Buddhism*. Richmond: Curzon Press.
12. Harvey, Peter (2000) *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
13. Jayasuriya, W.F. (1976) *The Psychology and Philosophy of Buddhism: An Introduction to the Abhidhamma*. Kuala Lumpur.
14. Johansson, Rune E.A. (1979) *The Dynamic Psychology of Early Buddhism*. Oxford: Curzon Press.
15. Kalupahana, David J. (1987) *The Principles of Buddhist Psychology*. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press.
16. Karunadasa, Y. (2010) *The Theravāda Abhidhamma*. Hong Kong: Centre of Buddhist Studies, The University of Hong Kong.
17. Karunadasa, Y. (2013) *Early Buddhist Teachings: The Middle Position in Theory and Practice*. Hong Kong: Centre of Buddhist Studies, The University of Hong Kong.
18. Karunadasa, Y. (2015) *Buddhist Analysis of Matter*. Hong Kong: Centre of Buddhist Studies, The University of Hong Kong.
19. Karunaratne, W.S. (1988) *Theory of Causality in Early Buddhism*. Nugegoda, Sri Lanka: Indumati Karunaratne.
20. Ñāṇamoli, Bikkhu (1999) *The Path of Purification: Visuddhimagga (Vipassanā Meditation and the Buddha's Teaching)*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.
21. Ñāṇananda, Bhikkhu (1986) *Concept and Reality in Early Buddhist Thought*. Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society.
22. Nyanaponika Thera (1956/1996) *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*. Boston: Weiser Books.
23. Rahula, W. (1959/1978) *What the Buddha Taught*. London: the Gordon Fraser Gallery Ltd, 1978.
24. Somaratne, G. A. (2022) *An Introduction to Early Buddhist Soteriology: Freedom of Mind and Freedom by Wisdom*. Palgrave Macmillan.
25. Somaratne, G. A. (2021) *The Buddha's Teaching: A Buddhistic Analysis*. Palgrave Macmillan.
26. Walshe, Maurice (1995) *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Digha Nikaya*. London: Wisdom Publications.

Recommended Internet Resources

1. An Entrance to the World of Buddhism [www.buddhistdoor.com]
2. Buddhism and Science [www.mindandlife.org]
3. Journal for mindfulness practitioners [www.inquiringmind.com]
4. Mindfulness teachers talks [www.dhammaseed.org]
5. Access to insight [www.accesstoinsight.org]
6. Buddhist Dictionary [glossary.buddhistdoor.com]
7. Translations of the Buddha's discourses [<http://suttacentral.net/>]

A Note:

Please check the Course Moodle Page regularly for course updates, announcements, weekly lecture

notes, readings materials, class activities, quizzes, attendance marking, submission of assignments, sample assignments, recordings of classes, and feedback for your submitted assignments.