

Religion 386

Studies in Buddhism: Engaged Buddhism



Fall 2015
MW 3:45-5:05
Smith 337

Instructor: Gareth Fisher
gfisher@syr.edu
Office: Hall of Languages 505
Office Hours: M 2-3:30 *or* by appointment

Course Overview

In this course, we will critically examine a social movement of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century known as “Engaged Buddhism” or sometimes “Socially Engaged Buddhism.” The term “Engaged Buddhism” originated with the Vietnamese activist Zen monk Thich Nhat Hanh during his struggle for non-violent resistance during the Vietnamese civil war. In subsequent decades, it has been taken up by social activists who aim to apply Buddhist ethics and practices in their struggles against poverty and social inequality, environmental degradation, democracy and human rights, gender and sexual equality, and peace efforts. As a socially active movement based on Buddhist practices that seeks to reform western society, in this course, we will also consider the increased application of Buddhist-based principles of “mindfulness” as a form of engaged Buddhism. Finally, the course will also focus on the role of Buddhism and Buddhists in nationalistic movements including those that make use of violence. While many engaged Buddhist activists would argue against the use of Buddhist practices and institutions in this way, it would be difficult to deny that it constitutes an example of social engagement in the world, as opposed to passive retreat. While some scholars argue that Buddhism has always been socially engaged, others suggest that Engaged Buddhism is a modern innovation in what is otherwise a religion that has taught its followers to renounce society. In this course, we will consider both possibilities. We will also consider whether it is ultimately beneficial for Buddhist adherents, particularly monastics, to actively involve themselves in society, or whether it would be better for them to remain withdrawn.

Course Objectives

In successfully completing this course, you will:

1. Develop critical knowledge of the issues facing global cultures, particularly those in Asia, and the role of religion in those societies.
2. Improve your ability to think critically and to develop and express logical, well-informed arguments in both verbal and written form.

Course Texts

There are no texts required for purchase for this course. All of the assigned readings can be found on the course blackboard page. However, especially if you do not have a prior background in the study of Buddhism, you may find it useful to purchase the following text (or a similar introductory guide to Buddhism):

Keown, Damien. 2013. *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

The book will also be placed on 1-day reserve at Bird Library.

Course Assignments and Requirements

1. Active Class Participation (25%).

You are expected to contribute actively to each class. We will regularly have in-class workshops and discussions. You are expected to come to class well-prepared and ready to contribute your analysis and findings in class exercises.

While your grade will be based on your participation, rather than your attendance, the former is impossible without the latter. For this reason, students missing four or more classes will receive a failing grade in class participation. You will receive a warning via e-mail if you have missed three. Students who are forced to miss class due to extenuating circumstances should notify the instructor as early as possible. In very exceptional cases, students may be allowed to “make up” missed classes.

2. Reading Questions (10%).

In order to make class time more productive, you are required to submit reading questions for selected classes as noted below in the schedule (usually the Monday of each week; a total of eleven questions). Questions are due via e-mail no later than 12 noon on the day of the class. **Because the questions are intended to be used in class, late questions will not be accepted.** A question should be around 1-2 sentences and focus on at least one of the assigned readings. Higher grades may be reserved for students who are consistently able to make connections across multiple readings. Your reading questions should relate to the main themes and problems discussed in the reading(s).

You should bring a printed, electronic, or handwritten copy of your question with you to class for your reference since you may be called on to read or summarize it.

A list of sample reading questions will be made available on the first day of class.

3. Discussion Responses (25%).

To facilitate student-led discussions (usually on the Wednesday of each week), discussion response paragraphs will be due by e-mail at 12 noon on the dates assigned (for a total of nine). **Because the responses are intended to be used in class discussion, late responses will not be accepted.** The discussion response should be approximately 200 words (one long paragraph) and focus on your analysis of aspects of the week’s readings, lectures, and other class activities that interest you. References to the readings should be focused and specific. Higher graded paragraphs will be those that succeed in integrating themes and ideas from multiple readings in a coherent and thoughtful fashion.

You should bring a printed, electronic, or handwritten copy of your response with you to class for your reference since you *will* be called on to read or summarize it.

A list of sample responses from previous semesters will be discussed in class before the first one is due.

Your response must not be submitted until after the set-up class for that week (usually Monday) so that you can incorporate what we discussed in that class into the response.

4. Class Debate (10%).

On Monday, Nov. 30, you will participate, with your classmates, in a debate on the question of whether Buddhism and Buddhists should be socially engaged or whether they are best off in retreat from society. The debate will provide the opportunity for a final, formal reflection on the movement we have discussed throughout the semester. On Wednesday, Nov. 11, the formal debate language will be distributed during class along with a list of the debate teams and positions. On Monday, Nov. 16, you will have the opportunity to prepare the debate during class time with your team. While you will debate as a group, grades will be assigned individually.

5. One short research paper (8-10 pages) profiling a key figure and/or movement within Engaged Buddhism (25%).

In this paper, you will combine library research with assigned course materials to provide an in-depth study of a key figure and/or movement within the history of Engaged Buddhism. In choosing your topic, please provide me (via e-mail) with a first and second choice. Topics will be approved on a first-come, first-served basis, but will be accepted no later than Monday, Sept. 28. Students who have not submitted a topic by that date will be assigned one. **The paper is due on Friday, Dec. 18 at 5 p.m.** You are encouraged to submit earlier drafts for review and feedback.

6. A group presentation of your research paper (5%).

During the final week of classes, you will present a brief informal presentation of your research work to the class along with other students researching the same topic. Your presentation should be organized and delivered collectively. Each member of the group will receive the same grade for the presentation, but individual grades may be raised for group members who ask intelligent questions to presenters from other groups.

During the second Wednesday of class, a more detailed assignment for the research paper and presentation, along with a list of possible topics, will be distributed.

Classroom Technology Use

We will be making frequent use of interactive media during class, so the use of laptop computers or tablets is encouraged and, on some days, will be required. Using laptops to take notes in class and consult reading questions and discussion responses is also encouraged. Use of technology for e-mail, texting, or non-class-related purposes, however, is not permitted. Students engaged in these activities may have their electronic devices confiscated for the duration of the day's class and/or receive deductions to their class participation grade. If you do not own a laptop or tablet, please let the instructor know right away so alternative arrangements can be made.

Academic Integrity

Syracuse University's academic integrity policy reflects the high value that we, as a university community, place on honesty in academic work. The policy defines our expectations for academic honesty and holds students accountable for the integrity of all work they submit. Students should understand that it is their responsibility to learn about course-specific expectations, as well as about university-wide academic integrity expectations. The university policy governs appropriate citation and use of sources, the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments, and the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verification of participation in class activities. The policy also prohibits students from submitting the same written work in more than one class without receiving written authorization in advance from both instructors. The presumptive penalty for a first instance of academic dishonesty by an undergraduate student is course failure, accompanied by a transcript notation indicating that the failure resulted from a violation of academic integrity policy. The presumptive penalty for a first instance of academic dishonesty by a graduate student is suspension or expulsion. SU students are required to read an online summary of the university's academic integrity expectations and provide an electronic signature agreeing to abide by them twice a year during pre-term check-in on MySlice. For more information and the complete policy, see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>.

Students with Disabilities / Special Needs

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu>, located at 804 University Avenue, room 309, or call 315-443-4498 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue "Accommodation Authorization Letters" to students with documented disabilities as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible.

Faith Traditions and Observances Policy

Syracuse University does not have non-instructional days for any religious holiday and students must notify instructors by the end of the second week of classes when they will be observing their religious holiday(s). SU's religious observances policy, found at http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.htm, recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holy days according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance provided they notify their instructors no later than the end of the second week of classes. Student deadlines are posted in My Slice under Student Services/Enrollment/My Religious Observances/Add a Notification.

Course Readings and Assignments

I. INTRODUCTION TO BUDDHISM

Monday, Aug. 31

(Outline of class; overview of the life and teachings of the Buddha).

Wednesday, Sep. 2

1. Martin, Rafe. 1988. "Thoughts on the Jatakas." In *The Path of Compassion*, ed. Fred Epstein. Berkeley: Parallax Press. Pp. 97-102.
2. Lopez, Donald, trans. 2003. "A Murderer becomes a Monk." In *Buddhist Scriptures*. London: Penguin. Pp. 252-61.

Reading Question #1 due by e-mail before 12 noon.

Wednesday, Sep. 9

1. Yampolsky, Philip, trans. 1967. *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*. New York: Columbia University Press. Pp. 125-33.

Reading Question #2 due by e-mail before 12 noon.

II. INTRODUCTION TO ENGAGED BUDDHISM

Monday, Sep. 14

1. King, Winston L. 1992. "Is There a Buddhist Ethic for the Modern World?" *The Eastern Buddhist* 2:1-13.
2. Bhikkhu Bodhi. 2009. "Socially Engaged Buddhism and the Trajectory of Buddhist Ethical Consciousness." *Religion East and West* 9:1-23.
3. Fisher, Gareth. 2015. "Master Mingyi: An Engaged Buddhist in Contemporary China?"

Reading Question #3 due by e-mail before 12 noon.

Wednesday, Sep. 16

Discussion #1

Discussion Response #1 due by e-mail before 12 noon.

II. ENGAGED BUDDHISM IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

A. Peace Work

Monday, Sep. 21

1. King, Sallie B. 1996. "Thich Nhat Hanh and the Unified Buddhist Church: Nondualism in Action." In *Action Dharma: New Studies in Engaged Buddhism*, ed. Christopher Queen et al. New York: Routledge. Pp. 321-64.
2. Moser-Puangsuwan, Yeshua. 2000. "The Buddha in the Battlefield: Maha Ghosananda Bhikkhu and the Dhammayietra Army of Peace." In *Nonviolence for the Third Millennium*, ed. Simon G. Harak. Macon: Mercer University Press. Pp. 121-36.
3. Maha Ghosananda Bhikkhu. 1999. "The Human Family." In *Buddhist Peacework*, ed. David W. Chappell. Boston: Wisdom. Pp. 151-54.
4. Thomas, Claude. 1996. "Finding Peace after a Lifetime of War." In *Engaged Buddhist Reader*, ed. Arnold Kotler. Berkeley: Parallax Press. Pp. 98-103.
5. Davis, Susan. 1993. "Working with Compassion: The Evolution of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship." *Tricycle* 2:59-61.

Reading Question #4 due by e-mail before 12 noon.

Wednesday, Sep. 23

Discussion #2

Discussion Response #2 due by e-mail before 12 noon.

B. Economic Inequality, Poverty, and Relief

Monday, Sep. 28

1. Thich Nhat Hanh. 1996. "The Individual, Society, and Nature." In *Engaged Buddhist Reader*, ed. Arnold Kotler. Berkeley: Parallax Press. Pp. 40-46.

2. Sulak Sivaraksa. 2002. "Economic Aspects of Social and Environmental Violence from a Buddhist Perspective." *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 22: 47-60.
3. Huang, C. Julia. 2003. "The Buddhist Tzu-Chi Foundation of Taiwan." In *Action Dharma: New Studies in Engaged Buddhism*, ed. Christopher Queen et al. New York: Routledge. Pp. 134-51.
4. Queen, Christopher. 1993. "The Great Conversion: Dr. Ambedkar and the Buddhist Revival." *Tricycle* 2:62-67.
5. Stultz, J. Anthony and Virginia Cohn Parkham. 1999. "Engaged Buddhism in the American Criminal Justice System: Shin Roots, Shin Blossoms." *The Pure Land* 16: 106-21.

Reading Question #5 due by e-mail before 12 noon.

Research Paper Topics Due before class (via e-mail)

Wednesday, Sep. 30

Discussion #3

Discussion Response #3 due by e-mail before 12 noon.

C. Democracy, Politics, and Human Rights

Monday, Oct. 5

1. Thich Nhat Hanh. 1996. "Ahimsa: the Path of Harmlessness" In *Buddhist Peacework*, ed. David W. Chappell. Boston: Wisdom. Pp. 155-64.
2. King, Sallie B. 2000. "Human Rights in Contemporary Engaged Buddhism." In *Buddhist Theology: Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars*, ed. Roger R. Jackson and John J. Makransky. Richmond: Curzon. Pp. 293-311.
3. Tsomo, Karma Leshe. 1999. "Aung San Suu Kyi." In *Buddhist Women Across Cultures: Realizations*. Albany: SUNY Press. Pp. 259-66.
4. Jordt, Ingrid. 2008. "Turning over the Bowl in Burma." *Religion in the News* 10(3): 1-6.
5. Baffelli, Erica. 2010. "Sōka Gakkai and Politics in Japan." *Religion Compass* 4(12): 746-56.

Reading Question #6 due by e-mail before 12 noon.

Wednesday, Oct. 7

Discussion #4

Discussion Response #4 due by e-mail before 12 noon.

D. Environmentalism

Monday, Oct. 12

1. Darlington, Susan M. 1998. "The Ordination of a Tree: the Buddhist Ecology Movement in Thailand." *Ethnology* 37(1): 1-15.
2. Kaza, Stephanie. 2000. "To Save all Beings: Buddhist Environmental Activism." In *Engaged Buddhism in the West*. Christopher Queen, ed. Boston: Wisdom. Pp. 159-83.
3. Kraft, Kenneth. 1997. "Nuclear Ecology and Engaged Buddhism." In *Buddhism and Ecology*, ed. Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryuken Williams. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. Pp. 269-90.
4. Park, Pori. 2010. "New Visions for Engaged Buddhism: The Jungto Society and the Indra's Net Community Movement in Contemporary Korea." *Contemporary Buddhism* 11(1): 27-46.

Reading Question #7 due by e-mail before 12 noon.

Wednesday, Oct. 14

Discussion #5

Discussion Response #5 due by e-mail before 12 noon.

E. Gender Equality and Sexual Rights

Monday, Oct. 19

1. Falk, Monica Lindberg. 2000. "Thammacarini Witthaya: The First Buddhist School for Girls in Thailand." In *Innovative Buddhist Women: Swimming Against the Stream*, ed. Karma Lekshe Tsomo. Richmond: Curzon. Pp. 61-71.
2. DeVido, Elise Anne. 2010. "The Women of Ciji." In *Taiwan's Buddhist Nuns*. Albany: SUNY Press. Pp. 63-78.
3. Tsomo, Karma Leshe. 2009. "Socially Engaged Buddhist Nuns: Activism in Taiwan and North America." *Journal of Global Buddhism* 10: 459-85.
4. Wilson, Jeff. 2012. "'All Beings Are Equally Embraced by Amida Buddha': Jodo Shinshu Buddhism and Same-Sex Marriage in the United States." *Journal of Global Buddhism* 13: 31-59.

Reading Question #8 due by e-mail before 12 noon.

Wednesday, Oct. 21

Discussion #6

Discussion Response #6 due by e-mail before 12 noon.

F. Education, Mindfulness, and Contemplative Studies

Monday, Oct. 26

1. Wilson, Jeff. 2014. "Mediating Mindfulness." In *Mindful America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Pp. 13-42.
2. Santorelli, Saki F. 1996. "Mindfulness and Mastery in the Workplace." in *Engaged Buddhist Reader*, ed. Arnold Kotler. Berkeley: Parallax Press. Pp. 39-45.
3. Haynes, Deborah J. et al. 2013. "The Blue Pearl: The Efficacy of Teaching Mindfulness Practices to College Students." *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 33:63-82.

Reading Question #9 due by e-mail before 12 noon.

Wednesday, Oct. 28

Discussion #7

Discussion Response #7 due by e-mail before 12 noon.

III. THE "DARK SIDE" OF ENGAGED BUDDHISM

A. Critiques of Engaged Buddhism and Engaged Buddhists

Monday, Nov. 2

1. Shiu, Henry and Leah Stokes. 2008. "Buddhist Animal Release Practices: Historic, Environmental, Public Health and Economic Concerns." *Contemporary Buddhism* 9(2): 181-96.
2. Lee, Ronan. 2014. "A Politician, Not an Icon: Aung San Suu Kyi's Silence on Myanmar's Muslim Rohingya." *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 25(3): 321-33.2.

3. Doyle, Tara. 2003. "Liberate the Mahabodhi Temple!': Socially Engaged Buddhism, Dalit-Style." In *Buddhism in the Modern World*, ed. Steven Heine and Charles S. Prebish. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Pp. 249-80.

Reading Question #10 due by e-mail before 12 noon.

Wednesday, Nov. 4

Discussion #8

Discussion Response #8 due by e-mail before 12 noon.

B. Militarism and Nationalism

Monday, Nov. 9

1. Kent, Daniel. 2010. "Onward Buddhist Soldiers: Preaching to the Sri Lankan Army." In *Buddhist Warfare*, ed. Michael K. Jerryson and Mark Juergensmeyer. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Pp. 157-78.
2. Jerryson, Michael K. 2010. "Militarizing Buddhism: Violence in Southern Thailand." In *Buddhist Warfare*, ed. Michael K. Jerryson and Mark Juergensmeyer. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Pp. 179-210.
3. Jordt, Ingrid. 2014. "Breaking Bad in Burma." *Religion in the News* 15(2): 1-9.

Reading Question #11 due by e-mail before 12 noon.

Wednesday, Nov. 11

Discussion #9

Discussion Response #9 due by e-mail before 12 noon.

Debate Assignment and Teams distributed at the end of class.

IV. ANALYZING ENGAGED BUDDHISM

A. Formal Debate and Discussion

Monday, Nov. 16

In-class debate preparation.

Wednesday, Nov. 18

No class – GF away at American Anthropological Association conference.

Monday, Nov. 30

Debate

Wednesday, Dec. 2

Discussion #10 – Free Discussion of Debate Issues

Discussion Response #10 due by e-mail before 12 noon.

B. Student Presentations of Independent Projects – Monday, Dec. 7 and Wednesday, Dec. 9

Research Paper due Friday, Dec. 18 at 5 p.m.