

Buddhist Wisdom Texts

Philosophies of Contemplation & The Poetics of Learning

Reli 470-570

Prof. Anne Klein

Tues.-Thurs.. 2:30-3:50

Wisdom is the central element of Buddhist traditions. The goal of every practitioner is to gain this wisdom, which promises to liberate one from all pain, and enlighten one into ongoing bliss. But what is this wisdom? And by what sort of contemplation might one actually incorporate it into one's being?

Contemplative learning occurs along a number of avenues. These include but are not limited to intellectual learning. There is, for example, the learning of stillness and stability, and the cultivation of various forms of appreciation, compassion and awareness, not to mention the promise of directly knowing an ineffable reality and staying awake while dreaming or even dying. How does one learn these things?

Since everything we do and say depends on some kind of knowing—whether understanding, judgment or assumption--this is a vita area of inquiry. Its significance is existential, philosophical, and religious. How do you know what you know? How do you learn what you do not yet know? Is knowing a function of mind alone or does the body have a role to play?

Most Buddhist traditions rely on some type of contemplative practice to foster and expand knowing. Such meditation, though often assumed to involve the mind alone, is actually an enterprise that engages the entire person, physically, emotionally, intellectually, and aesthetically. In this class we explore the processes of meditative knowing, and relate this to the process of knowing in other circumstances as well. What distinguishes intellectual from other kinds of knowing?

It so happens the Buddhist traditions themselves have very different views on how this occurs. The meditation practices they use also vary widely, depending on how a particular system understands human mental and bodily processes. For example, does thinking bring about real insight or prevent it? Does the religious imagination foster knowing or obscure it? Does the body have a role to play or should it simply be restrained?

In this class we will look at a variety of classic Buddhist texts on philosophy, meditation, and medical treatises describing the body which is the seat of meditation. We will selectively compare the latter with contemporary reflections on the body in order to develop the fullest possible picture of the art of knowing, especially the way the contemplative arts understand this.. For those of you interested, an opportunity to experiment with non-sectarian meditation is available and encouraged.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

ONE take-home midterm exam, 5-7 pages; ONE final paper 15-20 pages.
Active class participation and at least two mini-presentations; consistent attendance—this is the kind of course that is co-created by the entire class.

OVERVIEW OF ASSIGNMENTS: Readings span material on:

Mindful contemplation, cultivation of compassion, dream yoga, death and dying, physiology of tantra and Tibetan medicine. Ancient genres of literature encompass poetry, prose, philosophy, (ancient) science, Also included:
Select contemporary writing and scholarship to foster comparative reflection.

Please note that some texts are in the bookstore under RELI 322, Introduction to Buddhism.

Tues, Jan 15

Introduction and introductions, survey of purpose and path of the course..

A Bit of Inspiration

Thurs Jan 17

Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind (available in Bookstore under Reli 322)
How does learning seem to take place in this poetic, non-directive set of non-instructions?
Keep this work in mind as we explore the other end of the spectrum:

INTELLECT AS BRIDGE TO MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE

Tues. Jan 22: Overview:

Knowledge and Liberation—Introduction pp. 13-32; 33-27

Thurs. Jan 24: The specifics of what can be known:

Knowledge and Liberation pp. 37-67
Rec. K&L 68-88

Tues. Jan 29th Direct Perception and its Discontents

Introduction to Mind in Tibetan Buddhism (on reserve website)
Knowledge & Liberation p. 89-114

Thurs. Jan 31 Conceptual Thought and Its Relation to Reality
Knowledge & Liberation 115-140

*Knowing, Naming and Negation. pp. 28-38; 46-87 (on reserve website)

Tues. Feb 5 How Thought Really Works/The Prowess of Reasoning
K & L 141-174

Thurs. Feb. 7th How it Works Continued: The Power of Language
K& L 175-216

Tues. Feb 12 A Turn To Madhyamika
The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way pp. 3-22; 87-123

Thurs. Feb 14 Fundamentals of Wisdom
Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way 33-36; 39-40; 48-51; 60-83
REC: The entire text, including assigned segments.

(NOTE: IT MAY BE NECESSARY TO RE-SCHEDULE Feb 12 and 14th for an evening seminar (possibly with pizza!) on Wednesday, Feb 20th. We will discuss this in class)

Tues. Feb 19th. Questions of Authenticity, Part I.
**"Painting the Target" in Changing Minds, pp.63-81
**"The Perfectly Right Buddha" in Jeweled Staircase 49-61
Fundamental Wisdom, 245-257; 275-321
(Catch up on or reread Madhyamika materials!

Thurs. Feb 21 Your Wisdom

Reports and Discussion

WHOLENESS: NOT FOR INTELLECTUALS ?!

Tues. Feb 26th Authenticity in a Different Light
**"Painting the Target" in Changing Minds, pp.63-81
**"The Perfectly Right Buddha" in Jeweled Staircase 49-61
**""Dzogchen on Authenticity" in Changing Minds pp.133-151

MID-TERM DUE!!! NO IFS, ANDS OR BUTS!! AND COME TO CLASS!

Thurs. Feb 28 Effortless Authenticity
**"Authenticity, effortlessness, delusion and spontaneity" in New Horizons in Bon Studies
pp. 193-223
Readings to be Distributed
BEGIN TANTRIC PRACTICE IN NYINGMA (available under RELI 322 in bookstore)
20-44; 57-63

TUES MAR 5 & THURS MAR 7—MID TERM RECESS!
(and the hardest part of the course is over.)

BODIES OF KNOWLEDGE/

Tues. Mar 12 Religious Imagination: KHETSUN SANGPO RINPOCHE
(his presence on campus may reshape our discussion and schedule somewhat)

Tantric Practice in Nyingma , (available under Reli 322)

Thurs. Mar 14 (come to Intro to Buddhism in the morning if possible, for a talk by
Khetsun Sangpo Rinpoche)

Authenticity and The Platform Sutra
**The Platform Sutra 125-183
(Re-reader finish Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind
Readings to be Distributed

Thurs. Mar 19 More on Authenticity
Readings to be Distributed

Oral Reports

Thurs. Mar 21 Koans and the Body
**On Koans from Korean Approach to Zen (website reserve)
**"Tracing Back the Radiance" (website reserve)

Tues. Mar 26th TANTRA
Tantric Practice in Nyingma 113-153 (read chapter on Vajrasattva especially carefully, with
an eye to the kind of "knowing" involved.

****Thurs. Mar 28th**—Spring Recess**

Readings on the body and Tibetan Medicine—Volatile Bodies and Reader----details T.B.A.
by March 10th as we see how the course proceeds.

Monday - Wednesday, April 15 - 17

Self-scheduling of Final Examinations in undergraduate courses

Friday, April 26

LAST DAY OF CLASSES

Wednesday - Wednesday, May 1 - 8

Final examinations for non-graduating students

Saturday, May 4

9:00am Deadline: Grades for all degree candidates

