Buddhism, Mindfulness, and the Practical Mind

Today, mindfulness is touted as a panacea, the secret to happiness and health, superb sex and unparalleled productivity. The hype is not entirely new, however. For decades, ostensibly Buddhist ideas have been tossed around in the West as recipes for success in just about any art or craft. But what hides behind this craze? Can Buddhist teachings offer us tools with which to achieve our goals, or are we corrupting Buddhism by using it in such a way? What have artists and practitioners thought of the use of meditative tools, and how have they integrated Buddhist terms like “bare awareness” and “emptiness” into their work?
In order to answer such questions, we will start the course with a reading of the *Satipatṭāna Sutta*, the Buddha’s instructions on mindfulness meditation. A close reading of the text in our first unit will give us a glimpse of the ancient Buddhist practice, its complexity and richness. In our second unit, we will read the text that gave the West the idea that Buddhism can allow us to “hit the mark” without trying to do so, Eugen Herrigel’s bestselling *Zen in the Art of Archery*. Using Edward Said’s classic work, *Orientalism*, we will ask if Herrigel was romanticizing Zen Buddhism, and if he was, what the consequences of such a romanticization have for Japan and the West. In our last unit, we will dive into the contemporary debate about "McMindfulness" by looking at what scientists and Buddhist practitioners have said about the compatibility of Buddhism with its modern, secular appropriations.

As we read these texts, we will also *practice mindfulness meditation*, as well as various other forms of Buddhist meditation. In doing so, we will think about these meditations both practically and critically, at the same time as we refine our analytical understanding of Buddhist ideas.

**Required Readings**


You will also use Analyo, *Satipathana: The Direct Path to Realization* (Windhorse Publication, 2003) as a reference book. Analyo has made his entire book available freely online, but you may purchase it if you prefer to use the paper copy. All other readings will be available on Canvas.

**Assignments**

1. You will submit various short (one-page) response papers. These papers are designed to help you prepare for class, and will not typically take much of your time.
2. In each of our three units, you will submit one paper. You’ll start by submitting a draft of each of these three larger essays. On each draft, you’ll receive detailed comments from me (in writing and in 1-1 conferences).
3. You will include a cover letter with each essay and draft you submit. In this short letter, you will state your research question and your thesis, mention what you are still trying to figure out, what aspect of your research is not yet completed, and what parts of the essay you think you need help with.
4. We will have an in-class draft workshop after you submit each draft. For this workshop, I will choose two or three students’ drafts, and we will look at these works closely. In preparation for the workshops, you will submit written comments on the students’ work. The comments you will provide will help you become better editors of your own work.
5. We will meet for a 20-30 minute conference after each draft you submit, and talk about strategies for revising your essay.
6. The key to good writing is revision. You will therefore revise each of your drafts before submitting a final version of the essay for a grade.
7. To prepare for each paper you write, you should read the assignment prompt (Canvas >> Assignments). This is a brief description of these papers:

* **Essay 1** is a four-page close reading of any part you choose of the Satipatthana Sutta. While you should consult Analayo’s work, as well as Joseph Goldstein’s book, you must develop your own argument about the sutta, and use evidence from the text to make your case.

* In **Essay 2**, you will use the analytical framework that Edward Said developed in *Orientalism* to explore Eugene Herrigel’s essay on Japanese archery. In this 5-8 page essay, you will engage in the scholarly debate about Herrigel’s work, using your understanding of *Orientalism*, as well as evidence from *Zen and the Art of Archery*, to make your argument.

* In **Essay 3**, you will examine any subject related to the application of Buddhist practices in the modern world. In this 8-12 page essay, you will develop your own research question and argument, using primary and secondary sources of your choice.

Descriptions of all three assignments will be found on our Canvas site (under Assignments), and we will discuss each of them in class.

**Other Course Policies**

- **Grading:** I will grade only the last version of your essays, not the drafts. The overall course grade will be determined as follows:

  Attendance and Participation: 10%
  
  Paper 1: 20%
  Paper 2: 30%
  Paper 3: 40%

- **Attendance and participation:** Participation is the key to our class’ success. I expect you to come promptly to every class, rested and alert, having prepared your readings and assignments. Students are expected to participate in class discussion and in-class activities, to engage with others respectfully and in a friendly manner.

  The policy of the Harvard College Writing Program is that if you miss more than one class without the excuse of a religious holiday or illness, you will receive a formal warning letter, copied to your Freshman Dean. If you then miss another class without a legitimate reason, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course. Please note that absences to participate in athletic or other extracurricular activities are not excusable. If you have to be absent for a religious holiday or other important event, please speak to me before the date you will be away.
• **Deadlines:** Our class will move very quickly, so you must submit work on time. I will only accept late work if the student contacts me to request an extension *well in advance* of the deadline, and has a compelling reason for doing so. Otherwise, late work will receive a significant grade penalty.

• **Completion of Work:** The policy of the Harvard College Writing Program is as follows: You must complete all three of the required courses essays (including drafts) in order to pass the course. All work must be completed by the relevant deadline unless you have made *prior* arrangements with me for an extension. If you then miss the extended deadline, you may be excluded from the course.

• **Policy on Electronic Submissions:** You will submit your work electronically this semester, by uploading it on Canvas. As you send or upload each document, it is your responsibility to ensure that you have saved the document as a Word document (doc., docx.). If you do not have Word on your computer, please use any of the computers available to you on campus (e.g. at Lamont Library or in your house). It is also your responsibility to ensure that the file you are sending is not corrupted or damaged, and that it has uploaded correctly by the deadline. If I cannot open or read the file you have sent, the essay will be subject to a late penalty. In case you are having technical difficulties, please call the Harvard ITS Service Desk: 617 495-7777, and let me know that a problem exists.

• **Collaboration Among Students:** Developing or refining ideas in conversation with other students and through peer review of written work (including feedback from Writing Center tutors) is recommended. If you would like to acknowledge the impact someone had on your essay, it is customary to do this in a footnote at the beginning of the paper. As stated in the Student Handbook, “You do not need to acknowledge discussion with others of general approaches to the assignment or assistance with proofreading.” However, all work submitted for this course must be your own: in other words, writing response papers, drafts, or revisions with other students is expressly forbidden.

• **Academic Honesty:** All work submitted for this course must be your own work. Any outside sources you use must be cited properly. Any student submitting plagiarized work is eligible to fail the course and will be referred to the college’s Administrative Board for further disciplinary action, including expulsion from the university. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism, consult the relevant sections of *Harvard Guide to Using Sources* and/or speak with the instructor.

• We will be using the Chicago Manual of Style Notes and Bibliography system of citation. For your convenience, you may access the manual either online (in [this link](#)) or at Harvard libraries.

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**Unit 1 – The Buddha’s Direct Path to Realization**

Monday, September 9


*Satipatthana Sutta (The Discourse on the Establishing of Mindfulness)* Majjhima Nikaya 10.
Wed, Sep 11
Read handout: The 'Art' of Close Reading.


Optional: Peter Harvey, "The Buddha and his Indian Context" (available on Canvas).

Response paper 1: "Find a problem in the text" due Sunday, Sep 15, 7pm. Upload your paper to Canvas (assignments >> Response paper 1). Note: do not spend a lot of time on this assignment.

Mon, Sep 16
Goldstein, 45-80.

*** Optional Reading: Analyo, *Satipatthana: The Direct Path to Realization* (Windhorse Publication, 2003). Harvard Coop and as a free pdf. (If you're interested in comparing translations, see either Analyo's translation in the opening of his book, or Bhikkhu Sujato’s translation, which can be found here: [https://suttacentral.net/mn10/en/sujato](https://suttacentral.net/mn10/en/sujato))

Note: Please fill out a student introduction form. Upload the form on Canvas (Assignments >> Student Introductions) I will hold intro meetings Monday and Wednesday.

Wed, Sep 18
Come to class with an outline of your draft. It’s okay if it’s a very, very rough outline. Bring your laptops, as well as any material you will need in order to write your essay.

*** Draft of Essay 1 is due Friday, Sep 20, 7pm. (Upload it to Assignments >> Essay 1 Draft. )***

*** 1-1 conferences with me will be held between Tuesday (9/24) and Friday (9/27). Please sign up for a slot on the Canvas scheduler.

Mon, Sep 23
Goldstein, 81-101.
Wed, Sep 25

Essay 1 Workshop:

Read and comment on students’ drafts (Modules >> Unit 1 Readings). Download and read the “Workshop Nuts and Bolts” handout. The last page of the handout is a form that will help you organize your comments on the students’ essays you’re commenting on. Bring two hard copies of your comments on each student’s draft to class, as well as a printed copy of the students’ essays (with your marginal comments and line-edits).

Mon, Sep 30

Goldstein, 101-120.

"Elements of an Academic Argument" handout (on Canvas).

Wed, Oct 2

Read the Kālāma Sutta

Look at Owl’s sample Chicago Style paper, as well as at the instructions on how to submit a revised paper. Ensure that your own paper is edited accordingly.

*** Revised Essay 1 Due Friday, Oct 4, 7pm. (Upload it to Assignments >> Essay 1 Revised.)***

Unit 2 – Zen, Archery, Orientalism

* Response Paper 2: “Describe a clinging.” Due Sun, Oct 6, at 7pm. Upload your paper to Canvas (assignments >> Response paper 2.)

Mon, Oct 7

Eugen Herrigel, Zen in the Art of Archery (1948). Read up to the section that opens “Day by day I found myself...”
**Wed, Oct 9**

Herrigel, rest of the book.

*** Monday, October 14 – Indigenous Peoples’ Day – No Classes ***


**Wed, Oct 16**


**Mon, Oct 21**

Said, *Orientalism*, rest of Ch. 1, as well as Ch.2 part iv.

**Wed, Oct 23**


Robert Sharf, “The Zen of Japanese Nationalism.” (Canvas)

*** A **draft of Essay 2** is due Friday, Oct 25, at 7pm. (To upload: Assignments >> Essay 2 Draft). Please sign up for a draft conference with me for the following week.***

*** After reading the "They Say, I Say" handout, please write **Response Paper 4**: "They Say, I Say” Due Sunday, Oct 27, 7pm. ***

**Mon, Oct 28**

Ron Purser and David Loy, "**Beyond McMindfulness**," Huffington Post, July 1, 2013.

**Wed, Oct 30**

Essay 2 workshop:
Read and comment on students’ drafts. Download the “Workshop Nuts and Bolts” document (Modules >> Resources and Handouts); fill out the last page of this document and print it. Bring two hard copies of your comments on each student’s draft to class.

**Unit 3: Buddhism Applied, Appropriated or Incorporated?**

Mon, Nov 4  
Library visit: class will meet at Widener Library (room TBA)

Wed, Nov 6  
Sources workshop

***Your revised Essay 2 is due on Thursday, Nov 7, at 7pm ***

Mon, Nov 11  

* Response Paper 6: Proposal for final essay and annotated bibliography due Tuesday, Nov 12, 7pm.*

Wed, Nov 13  

Mon, Nov 18  
Donald S. Lopez Jr., *The Scientific Buddha, His Short and Happy Life* (Yale Univ. Press, 2012), Ch. 2.  
UNC Writing Center, *Conclusions* (handout available on Canvas)
Wed, Nov 20

Mon, Nov 25
Concentrated writing: bring laptops to class, as well as any material you’ll need in order to write your draft.

*** A draft of Essay 3 is due Tues, Nov 26, at 7pm. ***

*** Thanksgiving Recess – November 27-31 ***

Mon, Dec 1
Last class!
Please bring a laptop to this class.

*** Instead of 1-1 conferences, we will hold small workshops with 3 students each, between Wed, 12/4 and Friday, 12/6. Please sign up for these workshops early. Come prepared to the workshop with hard copies of your friends’ drafts, as well as a printed version of your comments on the Workshop Nuts and Bolts form. ***

*** Revised final essay due date TBA ***