

Dharma Treasure Recommended Reading List

Getting Started:

Buddha

Karen Armstrong

This is my favorite biography of the Buddha. Very readable and informative.

What the Buddha Taught

Walpola Rahula

This is a classic. Easy to read, after all these decades, it is still the best introduction to the original teachings of the Buddha to be found. Very highly recommended.

Foundations of Buddhism

Rupert Gethin

Written as an introductory text for a University level Buddhist studies course, it is the best overview of Buddhism I know of. It is a highly accurate, well-balanced presentation that is up-to-date in terms of modern scholarship. Although it is a University text, it is very readable. Sections of certain chapters that are too “academic” can be readily skipped over without any great loss. Highly recommended.

Life of the Buddha: According to the Pali Canon

Bhikkhu Nanamoli (translator)

This is the life of the Buddha told largely in his own words, and is also an excellent introduction to the Buddha’s teachings. It is also the best introduction to reading the actual Suttas that I know of. Bhikkhu Nanamoli has gathered together particular Suttas describing important events in the Buddha’s life and career, and organized them in a temporal sequence so that they form a story. He then presents edited excerpts from these Suttas that are far easier to read and understand than the whole Suttas by themselves. These excerpts are introduced by “narrators” who describe the context of the readings and then make comments about their significance.

The books listed above complement each other.

Buddhism Without Beliefs

Stephen Batchelor

A clear and useful guide that can help newcomers to Buddhism to avoid some major pitfalls and misunderstandings. It is an excellent orientation manual for beginners on the Path, but should not be mistaken for more than that.

Confessions of a Buddhist Atheist

Stephen Batchelor

The autobiographical musings of a Westerner who first became a Tibetan monk, then a Korean Zen monk, and ended up as a secular Buddhist. This book is a very useful critique of the shortcomings of institutional and religious Buddhism. It, and his “Buddhism Without Beliefs,” enunciate an agnostic alternative to Buddhist religiosity that is well worth adopting. The author’s re-interpretation of the traditional story of the Buddha’s life is especially fascinating and helpful.

There are many good reasons to read this book. It is an important work, and is very strongly recommended. But there is one important caveat: Batchelor’s disappointment and lack of personal fulfillment have led him to throw out the baby with the bathwater. Because he has not been able to achieve the ultimate goals of the Buddhadharm himself, he has seriously underestimated the validity and attainability of those goals. It does not occur to him that, not only have the Dharma teachings been grossly distorted through time, but so have the meditation practices that once led uncountable numbers to personal transformation and Awakening. A “Christian Atheist” is someone who accepts and values the teachings of Jesus, but doesn’t believe that Jesus is God or has the power of salvation. As a “Buddhist Atheist,” the author sees Buddha’s teachings as a valuable path to better living and social change, but not as a means to personal spiritual transformation or any transcendent Awakening. In the end, his disillusionment and cynicism show through quite clearly. This is a valuable, informative, entertaining and highly readable book, but despite the author’s seeming credentials, it is NOT authoritative on the subject of Buddhadharm.

Understanding the Dharma:

Exploring Karma and Rebirth

Nagapriya

A Westerner who is ordained as a Buddhist monk conducts a profoundly Insightful exploration into the meaning and significance of Karma and Rebirth. A well-written, excellent and penetrating discussion.

Highly recommended.

Mutual Causality in Buddhism and General Systems Theory: The Dharma of Natural Systems

Joanna Macy

An absolutely marvelous description of Dependent Arising. The Buddha's notion of causality, central to every part of the Buddhadharmā, dovetails perfectly with the most up-to-date understanding of causality to be found in cybernetics, physics, ecology, and general systems theory.

From Chapter 1:

“In this doctrine, causality appears as a dynamically interdependent process. All factors, mental and physical, subsist in a web of mutual causal interaction, with no element or essence held to be immutable or autonomous. Understanding this is important because... our suffering is caused by the interplay of these factors and particularly by the delusion, craving, and aversion that arise from misapprehension of them. We fabricate our bondage by hypostatizing and clinging to what is by nature contingent and transient. The reifications we construct falsify experience, imprison us in egos of our own making, doom our lives to endless rounds of acquisition and anxiety. Being so caused, our suffering is not endemic; it is not inevitable. It can cease, the causal interplay reversed. The cessation is not effected by unity with or obedience to an immutable being aloof from space-time, nor by the power of any metaphysical substance or entity. Our hope hinges on no external agency, but derives rather from the causal

order itself where self and act, project and perception are mutually determining. Hence liberation entails a vision of the dependently co-arising nature of all phenomena. This vision, which amounts to a reorganization of personality, is made possible by the cleansing of perception (through meditation) and by moral conduct.

...Paticca Samupada is not a theory to which one assents, so much as a truth one is invited to experience, an insight one is invited to win... [N]irvana, emptiness, dharmadhatu, Buddha nature... gives rise to bliss and compassion, for, revealing the illusory nature of ego, it brings release from ego's strategies, cravings and fears... [I]t involves... a profound intuitive perception of dependent co-arising.”

Not exactly an easy read, but well worth the effort for anyone wanting a deep understanding of Dependent Arising and the very essence of the Buddhadharmā.

Practical Dependent Origination

Buddhadassa Bhikkhu

http://www.dhammadataalks.net/Books6/Bhikkhu_Buddhadassa_Paticcasamuppada.htm

Buddhadassa Bhikkhu, ordained at the age of twenty, was one of the best known and beloved Buddhist teachers in Thailand. He established Wat Suan Mokkh forest Dhamma center in Southern Thailand, was given five Honorary Doctorates by Thai universities, and his books, both written and transcribed from talks, fill a room at the National Library and influence all serious Buddhist studies. He worked to establish and explain the original realization of the Buddha before it got buried under commentaries, ritualism, and clerical politics. His work is based on extensive research of the Pali texts, especially the Buddha's Discourses, followed by personal experiment and practice with these teachings. His approach was always scientific, straight forward, and practical. He studied not only all schools of Buddhism, but the other major religious traditions as well, and sought to unite all genuinely religious people to work together to "drag humanity out from under the power of materialism." Towards the end of his life, he rejected religion, saying those who have penetrated to the highest understanding have no use for religion.

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu cuts through the traditional doctrine of rebirth to focus instead on dependent origination. Here he finds an explanation for both the cause and cessation of suffering that makes the end of suffering accessible in this life.

Handbook for Mankind*

Buddhadassa Bhikkhu

<http://www.buddhanet.net/budasa.htm>

Anatta and Rebirth*

Buddhadassa Bhikkhu

http://www.what-buddha-taught.net/Books7/Buddhadassa_Bhikkhu_Anatta_and_Rebirth.pdf

***Heartwood of the Bodhi Tree**

Buddhadassa Bhikkhu

The Psychic Grid

Beatrice Bruteau

This is an excellent explanation of what Buddhists call Emptiness (*Sunnata* or *Shunyata*). Written by a Western Philosopher, who is also a Christian and has probably never heard of Emptiness, it avoids many of the pitfalls of Buddhist writers on Emptiness.

The Buddha was a radical empiricist and a pragmatist, which is why his teachings resonate so well with modern science. His message to us was not to assume that our perceptions are a valid representation of reality, and to stop analyzing the world in terms of substance and essence, as consisting of things with inherent natures. The Buddha consistently refused to engage in discussions of ontology, focusing instead on epistemology, what we can know and how we can know it. Nevertheless, all but the most sophisticated of Tibetan and other Mahayana thinkers have mistaken the notion of Emptiness for a doctrine about what *exists*. It is not. It is a statement that what we perceive is not, and cannot be, what actually *is*.

Dr. Bruteau's discussion of how we create the world we know makes this perfectly clear. Once we understand that reality is Empty of being what it appears to us to be, and why, then questions about whether the things we perceive actually exist or not become irrelevant. "Things" exist – *but only in our minds*. "Something" exists outside of our minds,

there is an Ultimate Reality, but we can never perceive that reality directly. *We can never have a direct experience of ultimate reality*, but we can have a direct experience that reveals this fact to us – a direct experience of Emptiness. Liberating insight comes through this realization of Emptiness. Ignorance is destroyed, the illusion we have been trapped in for our entire lives is dispelled, and true wisdom follows.

I highly recommend this book for everyone, but especially for anyone who has struggled to understand the teachings on Emptiness.

Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness*

Khenpo Tsultrim Gyampo, Rinpoche

Hua-yen Buddhism*

Francis H Cook

Buddha and His Teachings*

Narada Thera

Buddhism as a Force for Social Change:

Money Sex War Karma: Notes for a Buddhist Revolution*

David R Loy

New Social Face of Buddhism - A Call to Action*

Ken Jones

Mind and Consciousness:

Society of Mind*

Marvin Minsky

Practical Stuff:

Suffering is Optional

Cheri Huber

I was originally attracted to this book because of the title, but in it I found a solid method for bringing mindfulness into daily life. Cheri Huber has been a student and teacher of Zen for thirty years, and she's good at what she does. The book comes out of a twelve-week online class where she emailed assignments to class members, and then distributed selected responses to the entire class along with her comments.

What I find so useful was the assignments, which challenge people to make careful observations on specific topics during the course of their daily lives. People are always asking, "How can I learn to be more mindful in my daily life?" As you will see when you read this book, being given an assignment to be mindful of something in particular for a week at a time accomplishes this wonderfully well. The author's assignments are well chosen and very effective. So if you feel like you could use some help in becoming more mindful, read this book.

Meditation:

Hoofprint of the Ox: Principles of the Chan*

Master Sheng-Yen with Stevenson Dan

Anapanasati (Mindfulness of Breathing)*

Buddhadassa Bhikkhu

http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf_file/anapanasati.pdf

* Descriptive comments will be added at a later date.