Intro to Buddhism in the US
Week 3: The historical Buddha, the Pali Canon, and contemporary U.S. Theravadan

OLLI, Charlottesville, VA

29 September 2026

Link to readings and slides:https://parusanalytics.com/introbud2026/week-three-2026.html

DAILY DHARMA

24-Sept-2026

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Our Existence

“

We don’t exist substantially or intrinsically or independently, but our existence, like the existence of everything else, is interdependent, conventional, constantly changing.

Jay L. Garfield, “How to Live Without a Self (and Be a Better Person)”

CLICK HERE TO READ THE ARTICLE

Vietnam: some specific cases of the law of karma

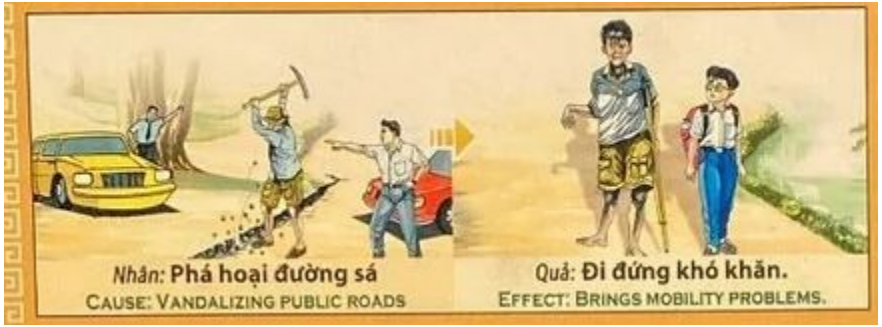


variously from temples in Can Tho and Hanoi (One Pillar Temple adjacent to Ho Chi Minh's tomb)

Vietnam: some specific cases of the law of karma



Vietnam: hey, you guys may nominally be Communist atheists (yeah, right…) but we can help out the state…





Biographical accounts of the life of the Buddha

- Karen Armstrong. *Buddha.* (2001) A relatively short and very clearly written narrative of the life of the Buddha looking at various textual sources—trying to sort the probable from the mythical—and historical context

- Thich Nhat Hanh. *Old Path, White Clouds.* (1987) A very extended life of the Buddha; one of TNH's first works and you can also see various ways he is developing his modernizing concepts via what is included and excluded from the copious available accounts.

- Stephen Batchelor. *Confession of a Buddhist Atheist* (2010) One of Batchelor's earliest secular Buddhism books, attempts to figure out the actual life of the Buddha, albeit this is one of several themes of the book.

Higher criticism: criteria for assessing Biblical stories

- multiple attestation (being mentioned in multiple independent sources) [not an option for independent sources, but there is redundancy in the Pali Canon]
- the criterion of dissimilarity (unique teachings not found in surrounding cultures),
- the criterion of embarrassment (stories that might be considered embarrassing to early Christians),
- archaeological evidence that corroborates details [not an option before Ashoka]
- internal consistency within the biblical text;

[summary by Google AI Overview, 20-Jan-2024]

Also see Rita Gross, https://tricycle.org/magazine/buddhist-history-buddhist-practitioners/

Background

- Born in Lumbini (modern Nepal) as **Siddhartha Gautama** in the relatively small Shakya state
- Almost certainly raised in what we would now recognize as the **Kshatriya** caste
- Standard story about pampered childhood apparently actually refers to an earlier incarnation; teachings are consistent with someone raised as a warrior
    - Note that the story of trading an idyllic life for the messy knowledge of reality is one of the universal human myths, e.g. Garden of Eden, *Lord of the Rings*

Enlightenment [bodhi]

- Left his young family around age 30 to spend six years as a wandering ascetic
- Mastered two intense meditation practices -- jnanas and something else -- without attaining what he wanted
- Went into a severe ascetic mode almost to the point of death until rescued by a young woman who persuaded him to eat
- Upon recovering his strength, sat under the bodhi tree in Bodhgaya fighting the demon Mara who presented the poisons of anger, greed/lust and delusion
    - Mara's final gambit was **doubt**, asking why the Buddha deserved enlightenment. The Buddha touched the ground and said "The earth is my witness" and was enlightened. Note the earth is also generally considered female
- Wandered around in a state of bliss until the god Brahma persuaded him to teach
- Gave his first sermon—on, ahem, the Four Noble Truths—at the Deer Park in Varanasi to five followers who had initially rejected his abandoning asceticism, and they were enlightened...

Forty years of active teaching

- Walked around a lot then would settle in one place during the annual rainy season, gave a lot of sermons, attracted a lot of followers
- Founded a lot of monasteries with patronage of local elites, with whom he was clearly quite comfortable
- Debated some Brahmins and wandering ascetics; others he ignored
- Definitely rejects the emerging caste system
- Kept meditating (!!)

Controversies

Internal schisms:

- Kosambe: Went into seclusion for a year and a half over disagreements within the monastic sangha: "Can't y'all just get along??" [paraphrase…]. See Susan Stone's trilogy
- Devadatta schism: much more serious with multiple assassination attempts, over the issue of how strict monastic rules should be (and by implication, succession), but eventually burned out
    - This issue is very similar to one of the first Christian heresies/controversies, Donatism
    - Also sort of Judas in terms of betrayal: Devadatta was a cousin and one of the most important monks

Very reluctantly accepted women into as monastics

- This eventually comes to an end due to political instability in the Indian subcontinent ca. 1000 CE
- Bhikkhunī lineage revived in 2011 at Spirit Rock

Monastics frequently mentioned in suttas

- **Ananda**: first cousin, primary attendant, and often the straight man (asks Buddha a question and Buddha explains why he is wrong) but Buddha also lets him teach periodically. Known for his memory. Critical in the establishment of the order of bhikkhuni (nuns) by persuading the Buddha to ordain the Buddha's foster-mother Mahapajapati Gotami and got a lot of crap for this. Enlightened just in time to be at the First Council
- **Sariputta**: foremost in wisdom and by implication literature/theory
- **Moggallana**: foremost in experience and psychic powers…
- **Khema**: foremost nun, wife of King Bimbisara but exceeds him in spiritual accomplishments. Like Sariputta, excels in wisdom
- **Uppalavanna**: female parallel to Moggaliana; achieved enlightenment two weeks after becoming a nun, but prior to that had a difficult life (in some versions: sort of a Mary Magdalene in some versions of Mary Magdalene)

Around the time of his death (parinibbana)

- Withdrew from public life. Also had really serious back problems
- Many of his patrons died or were overthrown by their sons (one with the help of Devadatta…)
- Did not designate a successor: again, in the Theravadan tradition one does not take refuge in a guru
- Did not want his teachings translated to Sanskrit but instead to be taught in local languages
- Did not systematize monastic rules
- May or may not have been poisoned
- Final words (more or less: many variants):"All things are impermanent; practice diligently"

Following the death of the Buddha

- Shortly thereafter, the first Buddhist council assembled to record all of the teaching
- Sangha splits into 18 different schools, though likely these are mostly relatively minor differences in monastic rules (Vinaya): the Theravadan is simply the only surviving version
- The Shakya state was utterly smashed by a neighboring more powerful state within a generation
- Teachings were initially maintained orally—common at the time—then systematically collected ca. 50-20BCE, and eventually committed to stable media such as paper
- Ashoka (ruled ca. 268-232 BCE; Mauryan dynasty) unites much of South Asia into a single empire, converts to Buddhism and leaves to first surviving (stone: 50 ton, 50 ft tall, hard to miss…) inscriptions on morality and good governance based on Buddhist dharma

Golden Age of Indian Buddhist Philosophy

Book by Jan Westerhoff. Period is about 200 - 500 CE

Nagarjuna: emphasis on emptiness

Visuddhimagga: ["Path of Purification"] Core text for the Theravadan approach, compiled by Buddhaghosa around 500CE from existing Sri Lankan knowledge and practice. Far more systematic and philosophically rigorous than the Sutta Pitaka, though also differs quite significantly in some aspects, particularly meditation practices.

Development of multiple major philosophical schools, most notably

- **Yogachara** (Sanskrit: योगाचार, IAST: *Yogācāra*) is an influential tradition of Buddhist philosophy and psychology emphasizing the study of cognition, perception, and consciousness through the interior lens of meditation, as well as philosophical reasoning (hetuvidyā). [Google]
- Mādhyamaka focuses on the ultimate nature of phenomena as well as the non-conceptual realization of ultimate reality that is experienced in meditation.[4] **;** [also Google]. Essentially it is the implementation of Nagarjuna's approach

Following the death of the Buddha

- Buddhism would eventually virtually die out in India, losing in competition to the more adaptable and lay-friendly Hinduism, and in the instability accompanying the Mughal Moslem conquest (1520s to 1720s) followed by the instability of European colonialism, albeit by most accounts it was pretty much done before the Mughals arrived. Theravadan Buddhism continues to thrive in Sri Lanka and southeast Asia
- Partial revival in India the mid-20th century as an anti-caste movement, notably by B.R. Ambedkar (1898-1956)

On that note, time for questions and a break!

The Pali Canon and other literature

The Tripitaka (ca. 30BCE, established by the 4th Buddhist Council)

- Vinaya Piṭaka ("Discipline Basket"), dealing with rules or discipline of the monastic sangha; for men this has 227 rules (by comparison, in English the Nicean Creed defining Christianity has 226 *words*). There are 311 rules for nuns, the additions mostly countering "mean girls" behaviors but a few dealing, predictably, with subordination (but in theory not exploitation) by male monks. See http://www.palicanon.org/index.php/vinaya-pitaka/bhikkhu-pa-imokkha
- Sutta Piṭaka (Sutra/Sayings Basket), discourses and sermons of Buddha, some religious poetry and is the largest basket; this is subdivided into a number of parts, albeit these are largely based on length, not topic.
- Abhidhamma Piṭaka, treatises that elaborate Buddhist doctrines, particularly about mind, also called the "systematic philosophy" basket.

  source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/P%C4%81li_Canon

Dammapada: relatively short (and readable) collection of 26 chapters of verses, organized by topic,so it is much like Proverbs or the Gospel of Thomas.

The challenge of Pali

- Pali is not “the language spoken by the Buddha” (though it is probably related): it is the language of the Pali canon.
- The Pali canon was finally written down about 400 to 500 years, and some 1500 miles, and in a distinctly different culture (Sri Lanka) than the original teachings of the Buddha
- The absence of a larger literature, as would have occurred had the Buddha concurred on recording his teachings in Sanskrit, means not all words and allusions are obvious:
    - This is not unique to Buddhism: one of the most widely cited phrases in all of Christianity, “give us this day our daily bread” contains the Greek term “*epiousion*” which while usually translated as “daily”, is not the usual Greek word for that, and it occurs no where else (and is the only adjective in the Lord’s Prayer)
- As I’ve noted at numerous points, early translations of some central terms—“suffering”, “concentration”, “noble truths”—are probably not what we’d use today but have persisted

Despite being a "canon" suttas were almost certainly written over an extended period of time, much of this long after the lifetime of the Buddha

- Only very recently have multiple versions been available for comparison and "higher criticism"
  - This situation will change as these are digitized
- There is apparently a sutta—somewhere…—that discusses how to create a sutta
  - The Gotami Sutta (AN 8.53) discuss how to evaluate the validity of a teaching or sutta
  - Compare 2 Thessalonians which cautions against letters circulating that are not in fact by Paul. Except many scholars believe 2 Thessalonians—already controversial as the basis of "dispensationalism" of the once popular *Left Behind* series—was a much later letter and not written by Paul. In classical times, attributing something to a famous writer was fairly common and not considered that uncool.

Gil Fronsdahl on trying to figure out why a sutta is structured as it is and when it might have been written: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FIpOh5K0t7E

Random selection from "The Great Discourse on the Lineage" illustrating the level of redundancy: this is very typical of the Pali suttas

4. "Monks, it was ninety-one cosmic cycles ago that the Blessed One Vipassī, the Worthy One, the Perfectly Enlightened One, arose in the world. Monks, it was thirty-one cosmic cycles ago that the Blessed One Sikhī, the Worthy One, the Perfectly Enlightened One, arose in the world. In that very same thirty-first cosmic cycle, monks, the Blessed One Vessabhū, the Worthy One, the Perfectly Enlightened One, arose in the world. In this very same fortunate cosmic cycle, monks, the Blessed One Kakusandha, the Worthy One, the Perfectly Enlightened One, arose in the world. In this very same fortunate cosmic cycle, monks, the Blessed One Koṇāgamana, the Worthy One, the Perfectly Enlightened One, arose in the world. In this very same fortunate cosmic cycle, monks, the Blessed One Kassapa, the Worthy One, the Perfectly Enlightened One, arose in the world. In this very same fortunate cosmic cycle, monks, I have now arisen in the world as a Worthy One, a Perfectly Enlightened One.

5. "Monks, the Blessed One Vipassī, the Worthy One, the Perfectly Enlightened One, was of the warrior caste by birth, arose in a family of the warrior caste. Monks, the Blessed One Sikhī, the Worthy One, the Perfectly Enlightened One, was of the warrior caste by birth, arose in a family of the warrior caste. Monks, the Blessed One Vessabhū, the Worthy One, the Perfectly Enlightened One, was of the warrior caste by birth, arose in a family of the warrior caste. Monks, the Blessed One Kakusandha, the Worthy One, the Perfectly Enlightened One, was a brahmin by birth, arose in a brahmin family. Monks, the Blessed One Koṇāgamana, the Worthy One, the Perfectly Enlightened One, was a brahmin by birth, arose in a brahmin family. Monks, the Blessed One Kassapa, the Worthy One, the Perfectly Enlightened One, was a brahmin by birth, arose in a brahmin family. Monks, I at present, the Worthy One, the Perfectly Enlightened One, was of the warrior caste by birth, arisen in a family of the warrior caste.

6. "Monks, the Blessed One Vipassī, the Worthy One, the Perfectly Enlightened One, was of the Koṇḍañña clan. Monks, the Blessed One Sikhī, the Worthy One, the Perfectly Enlightened One, was of the Koṇḍañña clan. Monks, the Blessed One Vessabhū, the Worthy One, the Perfectly Enlightened One, was of the Koṇḍañña clan. Monks, the Blessed One Kakusandha, the Worthy One, the Perfectly Enlightened One, was of the Kassapa clan. Monks, the Blessed One Koṇāgamana, the Worthy One, the Perfectly Enlightened One, was of the Kassapa clan. Monks, the Blessed One Kassapa, the Worthy One, the Perfectly Enlightened One, was of the Kassapa clan. Monks, I at present, the Worthy One, the Perfectly Enlightened One, was of the Gotama clan.

7. "Monks, the life-span of the Blessed One Vipassī, the Worthy One, the Perfectly Enlightened One, was eighty thousand years. Monks, the life-span of the Blessed One Sikhī, the Worthy One, the Perfectly Enlightened One, was seventy thousand years. Monks, the life-span of the Blessed One Vessabhū, the Worthy One, the Perfectly Enlightened One, was sixty thousand years. Monks, the life-span of the Blessed One Kakusandha, the Worthy One, the Perfectly Enlightened One, was forty thousand years. Monks, the life-span of the Blessed One Koṇāgamana, the Worthy One, the Perfectly Enlightened One, was thirty thousand years. Monks, the life-span of the Blessed One Kassapa, the Worthy One, the Perfectly Enlightened One, was twenty thousand years. Monks, at present my life-span is short, limited, and brief; one who lives long lives a hundred years or a little more.

Suttas

Mindfulness and meditation

- **Sattipatthana Sutta**: Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness
- **Anapanasati Sutta**: Mindfulness of Breathing.
- **Karaniya Metta Sutta**

Foundations

- **Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta**: Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion.
- **Dhammapada**

Skeptical Buddhism

- **Kalama Sutta**

ChatGPT: Summarize the Buddhist Sattipatthana Sutta

The Sattipatthana Sutta is a central Buddhist scripture that describes the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. The sutta emphasizes the practice of mindfulness as a means to gain insight into the nature of existence and to overcome suffering.

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness are:

1. Mindfulness of the body: Paying attention to the physical sensations and movements of the body, including breathing, posture, and actions.
2. Mindfulness of feelings: Observing and understanding one's emotional states, both pleasant and unpleasant, without getting caught up in them.
3. Mindfulness of mind: Being aware of the thoughts and mental states that arise, and developing the ability to focus the mind and let go of distracting or unhelpful thoughts.
4. Mindfulness of phenomena: Investigating the nature of existence, including the impermanence and interconnectedness of all things, and gaining insight into the nature of reality.

By cultivating mindfulness in these four areas, one can develop greater awareness, understanding, and compassion, and ultimately attain enlightenment. The sutta teaches that the practice of mindfulness can lead to the cessation of suffering and the realization of ultimate truth.

Some non-AI observations of the Satipathana Sutta

- By comparing Pali and the earliest Chinese and Tibetan versions of the sutta, it appear that this went through periods of refinement, specifically the addition of the *khandas*, so that it became a foundational sutta. Analayo has written several books on it.
- Ignored by ChatGPT, this also contains an extended "cemetery contemplation" on the disintegration of a corpse: the objective is to cultivate impermanence and detachment
- Re: Buddhism via ChatGPT: one of the guys doing the [belated] *New York Times* "Hard Fork" tech podcast attempted to learn meditation using ChatGPT. It did not go well.

Kalama Sutta

"Come, Kalamas. Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing, nor upon tradition, nor upon rumor, nor upon scripture, nor upon surmise, nor upon axiom, nor upon specious reasoning, nor upon bias toward a notion pondered over, nor upon another's seeming ability, nor upon the consideration 'The monk is our teacher.' When you yourselves know: 'These things are bad, blamable, censured by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to harm and ill,' abandon them... When you yourselves know: 'These things are good, blameless, praised by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness,' enter on and abide in them."

And more suttas

Right behavior

- **Mangala Sutta**
- **Abhaya Sutta: To Prince Abhaya (right speech)**

Forgiveness (self and others)

- **Sallatha Sutta**
- **Angulimala Sutta**

Sudden enlightenment

- **Bahiya Sutta**

Mangala Sutta

Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Exalted One was dwelling at Anathapindika's monastery, in Jeta's Grove, near Savatthi. Now when the night was far spent, a certain deity whose surpassing splendor illuminated the entire Jeta Grove, came to the presence of the Exalted One and, drawing near, respectfully saluted him and stood at one side. Standing thus, he addressed the Exalted One in verse:

"Many deities and men, yearning after good, have pondered on blessings. Pray, tell me the greatest blessing!"

[The Buddha:]

"Not to associate with the foolish, but to associate with the wise; and to honor those who are worthy of honor — this is the greatest blessing.

To reside in a suitable locality, to have done meritorious actions in the past and to set oneself in the right course — this is the greatest blessing.

To have much learning, to be skillful in handicraft, well-trained in discipline, and to be of good speech — this is the greatest blessing.

To support mother and father, to cherish wife and children, and to be engaged in peaceful occupation — this is the greatest blessing.

To be generous in giving, to be righteous in conduct, to help one's relatives, and to be blameless in action — this is the greatest blessing.

To loathe more evil and abstain from it, to refrain from intoxicants, and to be steadfast in virtue — this is the greatest blessing.

To be respectful, humble, contented and grateful; and to listen to the Dhamma on due occasions — this is the greatest blessing.

To be patient and obedient, to associate with monks and to have religious discussions on due occasions — this is the greatest blessing.

Self-restraint, a holy and chaste life, the perception of the Noble Truths and the realisation of Nibbana — this is the greatest blessing.

A mind unruffled by the vagaries of fortune, from sorrow freed, from defilements cleansed, from fear liberated — this is the greatest blessing.

Those who thus abide, ever remain invincible, in happiness established. These are the greatest blessings."

Source: https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/khp/khp.5.nara.html

Major Suttas on Governance

- **Cakkavatti Sīhanāda Sutta (DN 26):** Found in the *Digha Nikaya* (Long Discourses), this is the definitive text on the duties of a righteous monarch (*Cakkavatti*). It teaches that poverty is the root cause of crime and social decay. Rather than punishing citizens, a good ruler must provide economic support, grain, capital for business, and livelihood resources to the destitute. Buddhist Society of We... +1
- **Maha-sudassana Sutta (DN 17):** Also in the *Digha Nikaya*, this discourse details the glorious rule of a generous king who practices profound renunciation and distributes immense charity, showing that true royal power is measured by generosity and the welfare of the populace.
- **Kootadanta Sutta (DN 5):** This text emphasizes that solving social unrest through brute force or capital punishment is futile. Instead, the Buddha advises a king to eradicate crime by investing in the economic development of farmers, traders, and workers.
- **Maha-parinibbana Sutta (DN 16):** While focused on the Buddha's final days, this text outlines the **Aparihaniya Dhamma** (Conditions for Non-Decline). Originally given to prevent the political collapse of the Vajjian Republic, these principles mandate frequent public assemblies, consensus-building, respect for elders and women, and the upholding of established traditions. Buddhistdoor Global +1

Source: Google AI overview, accessed 28-Sept-2026

Key aspect of Theravadan: it is disintermediated

- No gurus or lineage
- No secret teachings
- Core source of knowledge is direct experience—Kalama Sutta—guided by the suttas

Upside:

- very attractive/natural to Victorian Protestants, and later US Protestants and Jews
- less likely to experience sexual abuse

Downside:

- absence of institutionalization compared, notably, to Tibetan in the US
- The huge body of teachings can be lost when monastics are suppressed and/or lose patronage

Individuals influential in establishing the Insight approach

Burma: Mahasi Sayadaw, lineage of Ledi Sayadaw (1846-1923) which established a lay tradition to preserve Buddhism against colonial incursions

Thailand: Ajahn Chah—Thai "forest sangha" rejected the rigid scholarly approach of official Thai Buddhism which dated back to Mongkut/Rama IV and was intended to curb the independence inherent in monastic meditation practice. Ajahn Chah is more than a bit of an anarchist (in a good way…)

India: S.N. Goenka (student of the Burmese approach)

Bengladesh: Dipa Ma

Key: these teachers actively encouraged the Americans to study with multiple teachers, not knowing what approaches would work in the US.

Ajahn Chah approach

"Just go into the room and put one chair in the center. Take the seat in the center of the room, open the doors and the windows, and see who comes to visit. You will witness all kinds of scenes and actors, all kind of temptations and stories,s everything imaginable. Your only job is to say in your seat. You will see it all arise and pass, and out of this, wisdom and understanding will come."
Zen Calendar 21-Jan-2025

[FWIW, that calendar does, in fact, have a lot of quotes relevant to actual Zen]

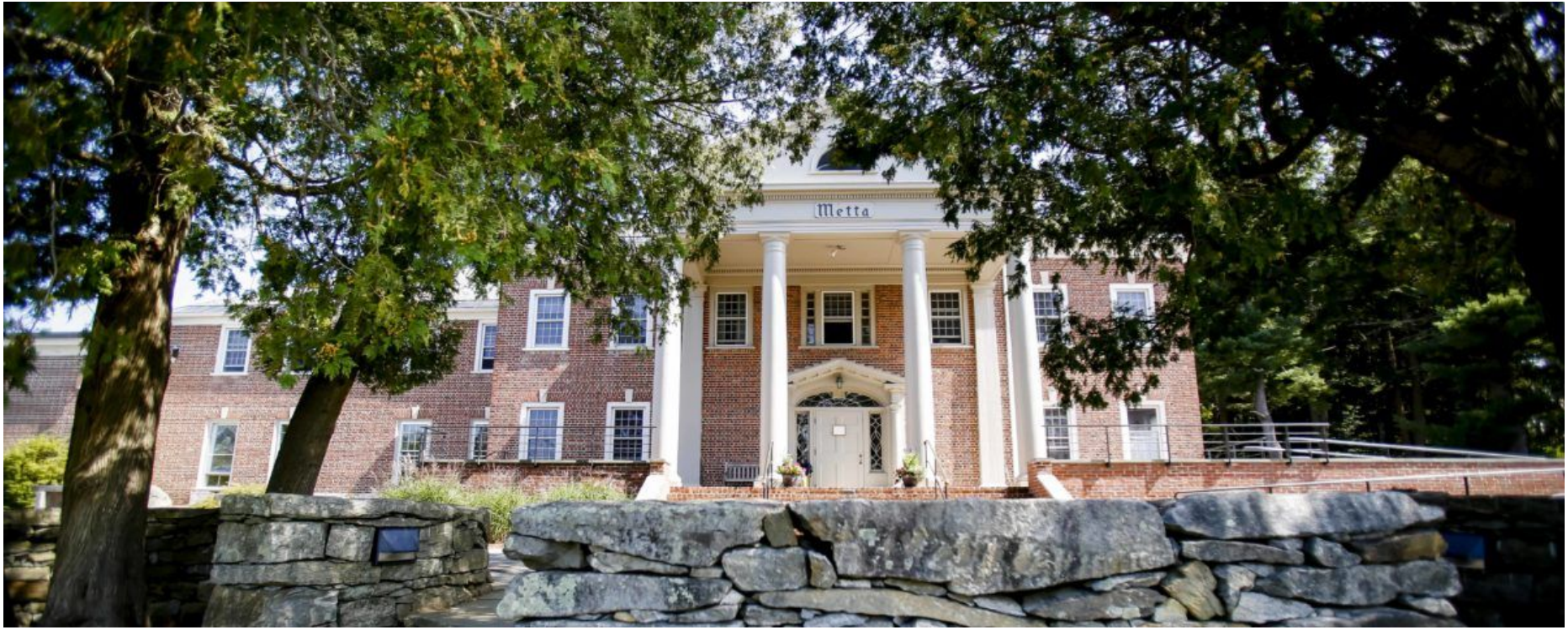
Ajahn Chah approach

Try to be mindful, and let things take their natural course. Then your mind will become still in any surroundings, like a clear forest pool. All kinds of wonderful, rare animals will come to drink at the pool, and you will clearly see the nature of all things. You will see many strange and wonderful things come and go, but you will be still. This is the happiness of the Buddha.

Quote from Ajahn Chah in Spirit Rock Meditation Center "Gratitude Hut"



teaching authorization ceremony at Insight Meditation Society with Mahashi Sayadaw (back row center). Fr
(left to right): Sharon Salzberg, Joseph Goldstein, Jack Kornfield, and Jacqueline Schwartz.



Insight Meditation Society, Barre, MA: https://www.dharma.org/



Spirit Rock Meditation Center, Marin County, CA. https://www.spiritrock.org

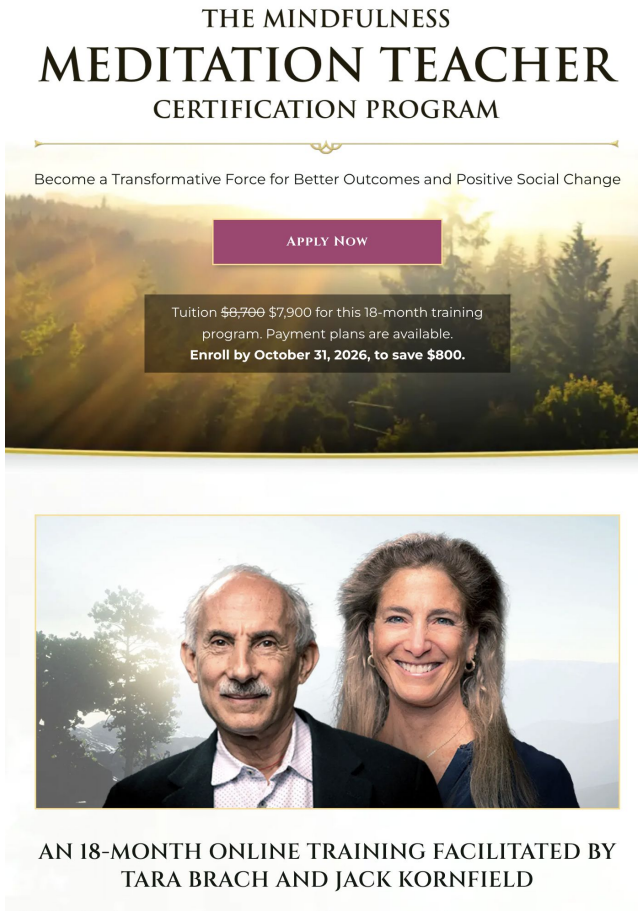
Some elements of Insight that are, IMHO, potentially problematic for its future

- Founders won't get out of the way and they aren't getting any younger.
- Remains largely coastal and urban
- No monastic structure! Instead, relatively informal training of "teachers", now including some quasi-commercial ventures (8,000 students in 70 countries).
    - Only 9 of the 115 retreat teachers on the IMS list are currently monastics; some were earlier
- Relatively little investment in physical infrastructure
- Ironically, given that Jon Kabat-Zinn developed MBSR—mindfulness-based stress reduction—on a Korea Zen model, it is closely associated with therapeutic/secular mindfulness

Some possible impediments to Insight monasticism

- Multiple Asian lineages, including Thai, Burmese and some Chan/Zen
- Orthodox Theravadan resistance to ordination of women
- Monastic experience can conflict with the day-to-day experience needed for effective therapeutic work
- Expansion beyond the coastal white upper-middle-class is a far higher priority
- It's not broken, so don't try to fix it

Theravadan monastics do exist in the USA—now famously the monks who did the 2026 walk for peace—but the Insight lineage has not developed this



$8,000?? Plus an $500 (with a $300 limited time offer! Maybe with a bonus set of Ginzu knives!!) prerequisite. But…tuition/fees at Harvard Divinity School are about $40,000 per year

THE TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAM

Welcome to the members of the 2025-2028 IMS/Spirit Rock Teacher Training Program. Read their bios here.

In January 2025, the Insight Meditation Society and Spirit Rock launched the first joint Teacher Training Program (TTP) we have run together since 2016. Run sometimes separately and other times jointly by IMS and Spirit Rock for decades, the four-year TTP is the primary means by which lay meditation teachers become qualified to teach retreats at insight meditation centers and communities across the country and abroad. Many of the established teachers who guide IMS and Spirit Rock retreats—teachers you know and love—are graduates of the TTP.

For the 2025-2028 training, 44 candidates were nominated between July and December of 2023, 30 from that group were invited to apply, and in June of 2024, 23 people were notified of their acceptance into the program. The six lead teachers for this Teacher Training Program are **DaRa Williams, Rebecca Bradshaw,** and **Shelly Graf,** on behalf of IMS; and **Tuere Sala, Tempel Smith,** and **John Martin** from Spirit Rock.

The IMS/Spirit Rock Teacher Training Program (TTP) has long been a source of mystery to those who are new to our respective communities, and even to those who've been around for some time. We often get asked about the application process, how cohorts are formed, and what trainees experience over the course of the four-year training.

This said, the "retreat teachers list for IMS has 115 names (Sept-2026)