



BUDDHIST STUDIES: WHY NOT

A look at the decline of UofT's once world-renowned Buddhist Studies program

BY EISEL MAZARD

Institutions have short memories. At UofT, the administrators and deans tend to be shuffled with about the same frequency as the passing generations of students. Very few staff --and even fewer students-- are aware that UofT once had the largest department working on South Asian languages and religions outside of India. With at least twelve staff working in Sanskrit and related languages, attracting a diverse circle of specialized graduate students, in the 1960s and '70s UofT was a world leader, producing many new translations and publications on Buddhist religion and philosophy.

Today, it is gone --almost without a trace.

This year, for the first time, Sanskrit is completely unavailable to undergraduate students; Prof. Leonard Priestley is teaching his 300-level Buddhist philosophy course for what is expected to be the last time --and while his retirement has not yet been confirmed, UofT's decision not to replace his expertise with a similar specialist (in Buddhist religion and ancient languages) after his departure has already been made. Decades of institutional myopia and mismanagement have entered their final stages -squandering the last vestiges of the academic legacy that began in 1963, with A.K. Warder.

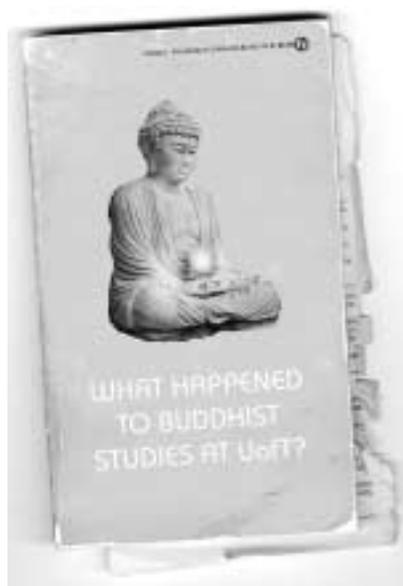
In my interview with Dr. Warder --the author of numerous, authoritative works on Sanskrit and Pali sources -- he described the decline of UofT's Buddhist (& related) studies in terms of the rise of a new administrative mentality. In the late 1960s, Provincial funding was for the first time directly linked to enrollment; in the decades following, UofT deans took an increasingly "economic" view of academic programming -- i.e., trying to

reproduce free-market mechanisms of competition within the publicly-funded institution. Much of Dr. Warder's energy was spent in opposition to this tendency in the latter half of his long and distinguished tenure (1963-'90). But the concert of several institutional forces seemed to ensure that his efforts would be spent in vain.

Firstly, the departments under which Buddhism, its related ancient languages, and the study of Asian history and cultures were allotted have been re-organized several times, either with total disregard for academic responsibility, or with some other preoccupation. Prior to 1969, the study of religion was wholly the responsibility of the colleges, without any centralized department; the result was a plurality of religious voices teaching competing courses at the undergraduate level. The introduction to Buddhism formed an exception, and in those early years was offered directly by the (then very broadly-defined) department of East Asian Studies. The establishment of the Department of Religion in 1969 marked the first of series of counter-productive changes. From its inception, the department itself was, in Dr. Warder's words, "A Department of Christianity under the guise of comparative religion" --a description which it still deserves to this day, if only with some mention of the growing compliment of Jewish studies.

Despite high enrollments, and evident success in attracting prestigious staff and graduate students, East Asian Studies was split into a number of smaller departments --but, despite Professor Warder's urging, no department or program of Buddhist Studies was ever established. From 1970 to '76, Buddhism remained prominent in the department of "Sanskrit

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Taking Action to Save and Build Buddhist Studies at UofT

A new student approached the Zen master and asked how he should prepare himself for his training. "Think of me as a bell," the master explained. "Give me a soft tap, and you will get a tiny ping. Strike hard, and you will receive a loud, resounding peal."

PROBLEM

Buddhist Studies at the University of Toronto could all but disappear by the year 2003-2004. The last of the professors who have taught in a program that was once worthy of international acclaim will retire in the academic year 2003-04 and there is no contingency to hire academics to fill their roles. Buddhist Studies have been drastically reduced in recent years to about three classes. There is no option for students to pursue a major in this area of study. In a world that is expanding its cultural and economic ties, in a city that is one of the most ethnically diverse, and in a university that prides itself on innovation we are failing this important aspect of study.

SOLUTION

We firmly believe that the University of Toronto can respond to the growing interest in Buddhism in North America by establishing a Centre for Buddhist Studies. By teaching students about a philosophy and religion that has remained vibrant for over 2,500 years, UofT will be enriching not just students but also the community. The Centre can become an important ground for international, inter-cultural and geopolitical exchange between Asia and North America. Establishing a Centre for Buddhist Studies would be a signal to the community that the University of Toronto is prepared to be a leader in this area of study. Not only would this centre be rooted in the classical studies of Buddhist subjects, it would also bring Buddhism to focus on the emerging needs of society at large. The centre would do this through exploring topics ranging from psychology and cognitive science; health and healing; personal, social and political peace; both creative art forms and new approaches to the sciences..

SUPPORT

We are gaining support for this proposal through endorsements of academics, concerned leaders and representatives of all governments and political parties, celebrities and renowned members of the Canadian and International communities. All our supporters feel that the study of Buddhism has a role to play in our university and community. Our supporters also feel strongly that integrating Buddhism into the University of Toronto will keep it linked to other vital communities of interest. We feel most emphatically that a school of thought that embraces universal acceptance and understanding should be pursued.

PROPOSAL

We propose that the administrators and academics at the University of Toronto call an emergency meeting to form an

Action Committee to bring forward a plan for the future of Buddhist Studies at U of T. The Action Committee should seriously

- 1) Assess allocation of fair and equitable resources to the field of Buddhist Studies
- 2) Propose a program of study based on the allocated resources and clearly delineate what possible contributions various levels of private funding can make.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

We are asking you to lend your support by sending us your testimony. We hope that with community endorsement, the University of Toronto will recognize that a Centre for Buddhist Studies should be an integral part of its diverse humanities curriculum. We need to ring the bell soundly.

Please email the U of T Buddhist Community at ca.zyvatkauskas@utoronto.ca or call Chris at 416-993-1940, if you are interested. Or mail the form below to UTBC at 21 Sussex Avenue, Rm 507 Toronto, ON M5S 1J6.

I support the creation of a Buddhist Studies Centre at the University of Toronto.

Name: _____

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Contact Information:

Reasons for your support (please use another page if necessary):

Looking Deeper Into the Picture

By MALCOLM KOO

Although one does not have to be religious to pursue the academic study of religion, it is conceivable that one may be more interested in studying the religious tradition that he or she is most familiar with. Results from the censuses indicated that the Buddhist population in Canada has tripled from 1981 to 1991. Such a dramatic increase of over 100,000 people could be due to either a change in the religious makeup of the recent immigrants or a boost in the number of local converts. Table 1 shows the top five source countries of immigration from 1970 to 2001. In recent years, more immigrants originated from countries with relatively large Buddhist populations. Although China is officially an atheist country, it has been estimated that 30% of the population adopts an eclectic mixture of local religions which include Buddhism. According to *the World Factbook 2001*, 47% of Koreans are Buddhists. Countries such as Taiwan and Sri Lanka, where a large proportion of their population is Buddhist, are also among the top ten source countries of immigration in the past few years. Using a conservative estimate of 50% of the immigrants (250,346 total immigrants in 2001) from China (16.1% of total immigrants) and Korea (3.8%) are Buddhists in 2001, only about 25,000 Buddhists can be accounted for. Therefore, the remaining 75,000 Buddhists are likely to be local converts. In other words, regardless of the future profile of immigrants, there is a potential need in the local population for pursuing a university-level Buddhist studies program or seeking resources provided by graduates and scholars. A Buddhist studies program is essential to meet the increase in the Buddhist population in Canada.

Figure 1. Percentage of Buddhist Population in Canada

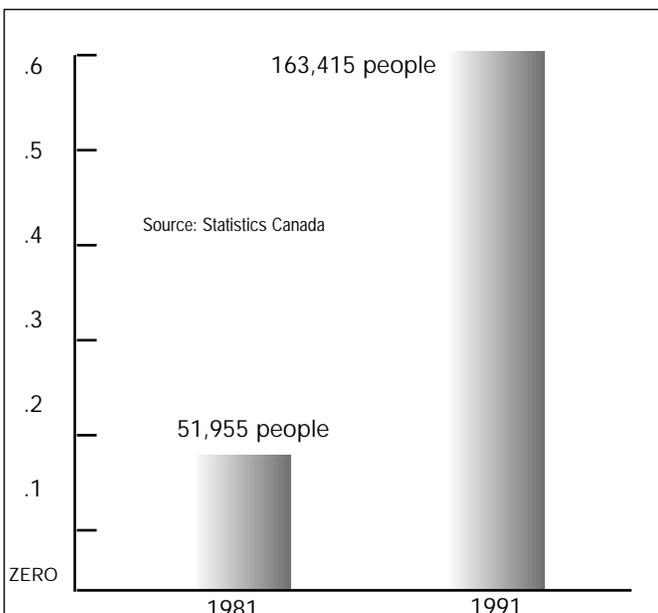


Figure 2. Percentage of Buddhism-Related Courses in Selected Canadian Universities

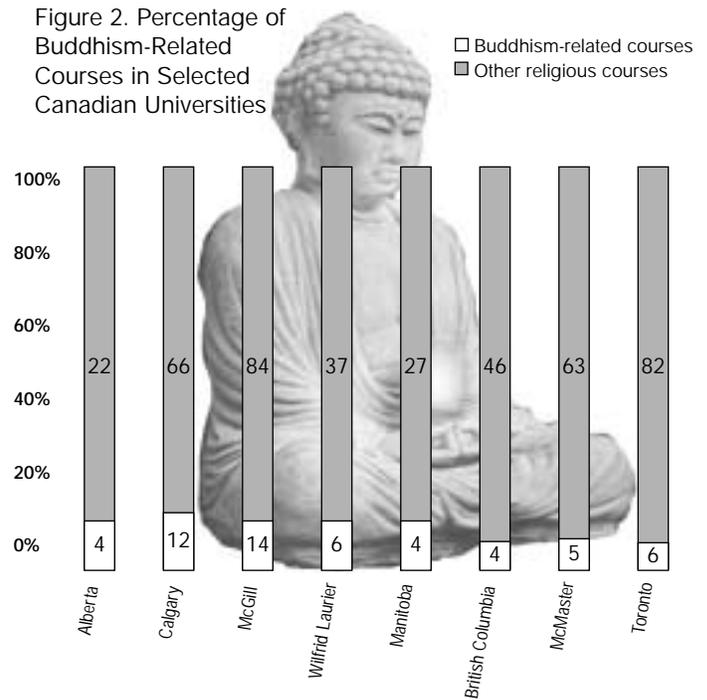


Figure 2 shows the percentage of Buddhist-related courses over other non-Buddhist-related courses in religious studies among selected Canadian universities. The data is collected using the online Programs of Study Database at the Directory of Canadian Universities (<http://www.aucc.ca:8800/>). Of the eight universities, University of Alberta ranked at the top where 4 out of 26 (15%) religious courses are Buddhism-related while only 7% of the religious courses are Buddhism-related at the University of Toronto.

Table 1. Top Five Source Countries of Immigration

RANK	1970	1980	1990	2001
1	Britain (18.7%)	Vietnam (17.8%)	Hong Kong (13.7%)	China (16.1%)
2	United States (16.5%)	Britain (12.8%)	Poland (7.7%)	India (11.1%)
3	West Indies (8.4%)	United States (6.9%)	Lebanon (5.8%)	Pakistan (6.1%)
4	Italy (5.8%)	India (5.9%)	Philippines (5.6%)	Philippines (5.2%)
5	Portugal (5.4%)	Hong Kong (4.4%)	India (5.1%)	Korea (3.8%)

Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada

THE RATNAVALI

The Ratnavali, 'the string of pearls', is a poem of advice and exhortation that Nagarjuna wrote to a king, in which he mixes uncompromisingly difficult emptiness theory with a more practical expression of that theory in terms of Buddhist ethics.

TRANSLATED FROM SANSKRIT BY PHILLIP ERNEST



To the extent that there is addiction to the idea of the aggregates, to that extent there is an I:

when the ego exists, then there is the act,
and from this again there is
the birth of conceptualized entities.



this is the wheel of the flux, without beginning,
end, and middle, that goes by
three ways;

it spins, animated by
the mutual conditioning of its members,
like a wheel of burning coals.



The ego is worn away by fear for itself
and for the other, by the three times,
and by frustrated desire: and from this, the deed,
and the birth of entities,
arise.



Seeing in this way the production of result from
cause, and this attrition of
the ego,

he does not come to the belief that the world is in
truth inexistent or
existent.

When the inconsiderate man has heard
the Law of the universal suffering
that wastes and wastes away away,

this realization makes him tremble,
and he despairs in his former fearlessness.



In extinction, none of all this shall exist,
nor shall your fear.

This is inexistence: what is it about it
that frightens you?



In liberation there is no self,
there are no aggregates: sweet is liberation,
if it is such!

Why do you fear this withdrawal of the self and
the aggregates?



Extinction is not inexistence. And how could it
have existence?

The wasting away of the grasping at existence
and inexistence: this is how
extinction is described.



2002 - The U of T Buddhist Community and Buddhist Student Association

BY CHRIS NG

During the school year of 1993-1994, several of us who were classmates in Professor Priestley's "The philosophy of the Buddha" course signed up for the registration of the Chinese Buddhist Student Association as a student club which later became the Buddhist Student Association that caters to undergraduate students and the U.of T. Buddhist Community that serves the broader community on campus.

Professor Priestley artfully presented in class very sophisticated Buddhist ideas that were simply delightful to the inquiring mind. Through our club, we would be able to present such lectures on Buddhism in an extra-curricular setting. While the understanding of the teachings of the Buddha could begin with intellectual and analytical inquiries, it is necessary that one proceed to the practice of the theories in one's life and in meditation. Our club also planned to bring the applied side of Buddhism to campus, an aspect lacking in academic courses.

Thus, for the past nine years, the Buddhist clubs have brought to the campus community academic lectures, meditation workshops, Dharma teachings about practice, Buddhism Awareness Weeks, as well as Buddhist cultural celebrations.

Our Activities have served as a forum for the exchange of intellectual ideas, a field for spiritual exploration and a refuge for spiritual growth. Through our clubs, people with an interest in Buddhism get to meet each other, become friends and offer mutual support for Dharma practice.

During these years of operations, our clubs encountered problems in respect of not having suitable physical space to conduct our activities. It has been an ongoing uphill battle. For the past four years, the university has started a planning process toward a multi-faith centre. Our club's own executives and representatives are encouraged by this initiative and have attended numerous meetings hosted by Student Affairs, hoping that the centre will be a reality in the near future.

Naturally, students interested in Buddhism want to take courses in Buddhism. The university has no program in Buddhist studies that allow students to pursue a major. Over the past nine years, the small handful of courses in Buddhism being offered continues to diminish. This small handful of courses is offered by two Departments: the Department of East Asian Studies (EAS) and the Department for the Study of Religion (RLG). Professor Priestley who teaches in the EAS is the last of a group of professors that were part of a comprehensive Buddhist studies program at U.of T.

None of the professors was replaced. The retirement of Professor Priestley after the academic year of 2002-2003 may be the very end of a legacy. The remaining handful of courses in Buddhism being offered in the RLG had primarily been taught by sessional instructors hired from year to year. These instructors came from backgrounds in the social sciences rather than Buddhist studies.

Simply put, I consider the EAS approach is one of studying Buddhism from the inside. The professors are required to have in-depth training in the languages and history of the countries where Buddhism flourished. With this background, they are able to research and uncover the teachings of Buddhism. The students following this program would be led progressively toward in-depth study of the subject matter.

Over these past years, the approach taken by RLG had been that of an outside approach. The instructors coming from the perspective of comparative religions and social sciences approach Buddhism as a social institution and observe, analyze or deconstruct the outer form of Buddhism. The methodologies of their respective disciplines are properly employed as frameworks against which Buddhism is put to scrutiny. The in-depth understanding of the teaching of Buddhism is not required. Students following this course of study are taught to analyze critically the form of Buddhism while skimming the surface of the substantial teachings of the school of thought.

Both approaches have their place in the field of academic study. Students who are genuinely interested in learning about Buddhism itself would tend to prefer the EAS approach. Increasingly, students in the disciplines of Cognitive Science, Psychology, Psychotherapy, theoretical sciences and western philosophy have come to learn about the vast writings in Buddhism that relate to their fields of study. These students would also benefit from the EAS approach of academic inquiry into Buddhism. Looking at Buddhism from the RLG approach would be meaningful as a supplementary study of Buddhism if the program under the EAS model can be maintained. Our clubs and the friends of our clubs are very saddened to see the collapse of Buddhist studies as it has been at U.of T with the departure of Professor Priestley, who had gallantly and single-handedly tried in some ways to maintain this program all by himself during the years that our clubs have been in existence.

Our clubs are bringing forward this critical issue for the reconsideration of the decision-makers at the university. Just as our hopes that the multifaith centre will provide space for Buddhist activities, we hope that we would have a decent Buddhist studies program to engage our inquiring minds.



BUDDHIST STUDIES: WHY NOT?

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and Indian Studies", but the fragmentation of the study of Asian languages and cultures did not bode well for the future. It was unclear where the academic responsibility for Buddhism lay; while encompassing philosophy, ancient and modern languages, history, and art-history, none of these departments were willing to depart from the Eurocentric canon to include Buddhist sources --and so it remains unto this day.

Where institutions fail to establish clear lines of accountability, resources are soon enough squandered. But in the 1970s --the apogee of UofT's expertise in Buddhism and related fields-- increasing tensions between the professors themselves blunted their attempts to lobby higher levels of the organization for constructive change. In fact, the infighting almost drove the department into receivership.

The pressure from the top was to re-evaluate academic programs in terms of sheer enrollment and profitability. Courses with poor numbers were cut without giving due consideration to their inter-dependency with other courses (often organized under other, fragmentary departments) or their contribution to a systematic program of study. The study of Tibetan was canceled soon after its first offering, seemingly without any awareness of the language's importance to students of Sanskrit and Chinese literature. Courses with excellent numbers, such as the introduction to Buddhism, were greedily appropriated by the Department of Religion, and treated as if they did not counterbalance the more advanced Buddhist studies under other departments.

However, the structural problems were greatly exacerbated by "A crisis of group psychology" among the professors --so it was described by Jeffrey Masson (Sanskrit professor from 1970-'80). While A.K. Warder's reputation and leadership had attracted many of the professors that had formed the original department of East Asian Studies, he also alienated many of them --including Dr. Masson-- with his traditional, British approach to chairing a department. In our telephone interview, Masson recounted that the ongoing fragmentation of East Asian studies was hastened by the clamour of many specialists "to get out from under Warder's thumb". Those who remained in "Sanskrit and Indian Studies" were constantly embroiled in struggles to hold Warder to the system of shared decision-making and consensus-building that had replaced the old model of one "head of department" ruling with arbitrary powers.

Masson reflects that when he first arrived at UofT, Chinese and Japanese were united in one department with the Indian languages, the study of Buddhism flourished, and everyone got along; but by the time of his departure, there was a pervasive sense of enmity within and between the departments that had driven away many of the graduate students and staff. "We had an opportunity to work together... all of us could have learned from each other, and maybe picked up six languages..." but "...the faculty abominated each other. You would think that people studying Buddhism would be able to practice some compassion, but we

couldn't co-operate academically". Masson now regrets the hostilities that were stirred up by his own struggles with the chair: "We were both wrong. Warder and I had been good friends before, and we became bitter enemies."

In 1976 the departments were again re-arranged, with Dr. Warder's requests for a separately-incorporated Buddhist Studies program again denied. The present ill-defined mess of East Asian Studies, South Asian Studies, religion, philosophy, etc., has emerged by degrees ever since; and the number of courses offered in Buddhist-related areas has precipitously declined. To some extent, the problem has been disguised by the dept. of Religion's habitual listing of courses on Asian religions that are not and cannot be offered, due to their own lack of staff; they have only one qualified lecturer in the field --Professor Neil McMullin-- and they have no plans to increase that number.

Let us bring a relative measure to bear on the state of Buddhist studies at UofT; after all, some will say that it is only a minority religion in Canada, and a minority academic interest --what sort of outlay is appropriate? It is certainly important for the university to adapt to reflect Toronto's own minority cultures, and the recent growth of the Caribbean Studies program at New College is an encouraging example of an institutional accommodation of a local, minority community, which has opened up an important new area of research, and diversified the historical, political, and cultural perspectives available to undergraduate students. Today, there are fewer dedicated professors, resources, and (actually-available) courses in Buddhism than in Caribbean Studies -- indeed, there is not even a Buddhist studies program organized under any college, so there is no voice within the institution to advocate on this academic interest's behalf. The array of Buddhist cultures encompasses a world population of more than a billion, ranging across the Himalayas from India to Korea, and encircling the myriad cultures of South-East-Asia from Sri Lanka to Japan --many of which cultures comprise significant minorities in Toronto today. It is a shame that in the same period in which the Caribbean, African, Aboriginal and other communities have found increasing representation for their cultures and religions at the university, Buddhist studies has declined --in fact, collapsed.

Establishing a Buddhists studies program would give a voice to this much-neglected area of study, and ensure that the resources UofT still possesses in this area (e.g., a substantial library collection in several languages) do not go to waste. However, the broader challenge for the future is of breaking down the Eurocentricity of the departments, and the profiteering mentality of the administration. The total disregard of Buddhist sources in the department of Philosophy is inexcusable, and is a very telling example of how the administrators regard Asian culture. Likewise, "Art History" is only European art history, whereas the rest is relegated to "East Asian Studies" --and so on for the other departments. Unless students and staff demand that all cultures be treated equally under the titles of "Religion", "Philosophy" and

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A Taste of Buddhism

Please Join Us For the *Open House* at the Fo Guang Shan Temple

Sat. October 5, 2002
11:30 am - 3:00 pm

6525 Millcreek Drive, Mississauga, ON
(Erin Mills Parkway South of Hwy 401)
(905) 814-0465 www.fgs.ca

You are cordially invited to the Open House of the Fo Guang Shan Temple
October 5, 2002 11:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

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- Traditional Chinese Tea Ceremony
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- Traditional Chinese Music Performance & Kung Fu
- Temple Tour & Introduction to our Buddhist Learning Centre

For more information please call (905)814-0465 or visit our website at www.fgs.ca

Open House Temple Field Trip

Everyone is invited to attend the Open House at the Fo Guang Shan Temple on **SATURDAY, OCTOBER 5, 2002.**

Members of the UTBC will meet at the International Student Centre at 10 a.m. to travel out to the temple together via the GO Train. If you need further information please email: ca.zyvatkaskas@utoronto.ca

otherwise we hope to see you there!

Buddhist Studies

— *Continued from previous page*

"Literature", the tacit presumption that these subjects need only be of concern to European authors will continue, to the exclusion of Buddhist sources.

Buddhist literature is not merely a subject for "East Asian Studies"; frankly, it rivals Christian literature in its diversity, profundity, and sheer volume. While the comments of Europeans about Buddhism are studied as philosophy, the philosophy itself is neither studied by the department of that name, nor by the department of Religion --and the one course on it under East Asian Studies is apparently in its final year. If some clear system of academic accountability is not established, the last vestiges of a once-great program will be lost without a trace --and the opportunity to build a diverse system of studies to reflect this uniquely diverse city will be wasted.

Chan Study Interpretations by Winston and Quenton Lok



PEOPLE WHO ARE ARROGANT AND/OR BIASED DON'T HAVE THEIR MIND OPENED TO LEARN. UNLESS THEY EMPTY AND CLEAN THEIR CUPS (MINDS), THE TASTE OF WATER (TRUTH) WILL BE AFFECTED.

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*University of Toronto Buddhist Community members From left to right:
Top: Philip Ernest, Eisel Mazard, Karen Chan, Steven Lok, Neihal Gamage, Malcolm Koo. Bottom: Quenton Lok, Winston Lok, Caz Zyvatkaukas, Chris Ng, Shani DeSilva, Bhante Kovida, Helen Chan.*

Mindfulness Meditation* and Qi-gong** exercises — 2002

The U of T Buddhist Community and The Buddhist Student Association are proud to present Meditation and Dharma Discussions with Bhante Kovida.

Bhante Kovida, officially of the Theravada tradition, ordained under the late venerable Ananda maitreya, also considers himself a student and devotee of the 'Buddhayaana' tradition - the ancient path of Shakyamuni Buddha, the forest monk and mystic.

Please join us on the following dates and more (to be announced). The atmosphere is relaxed.

All events to be held at the International Student Centre, 33 St. George Street

October 04: 5-7:30 pm

October 11: 5-7:30pm

October 18: 5-7:30pm

October 25: 5-8:30pm

* Mindfulness meditation is a process that at the minimum, reduces stress and anxiety in daily living and potentially leads to calmness and insightfulness about self and existence.

**Qi-gong is a body-energy exercise that revitalises the body and relaxes the mind. It is to be done in mindfulness.

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