

**BUDDHIST STUDIES CLASS
&
DHARMA TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAM
SYLLABUS**

TEACHER:

Venerable Dr. Thich Tri Hoang

LAY INSTRUCTORS:

Bill Ford, Julie Wagner, Jennifer Wheeler, other ordained DTO members

PLACE:

Woo Ju Library, Chuang Yen Monastery, Carmel, NY

CLASS SCHEDULE:

September-May, every other Saturday, 9am-noon

Quarterly days of mindfulness, 9am-4pm, also at Chuang Yen Monastery

One 3-day retreat in May, also at Chuang Yen Monastery

TUITION:

The tuition of \$100 per year goes to Chuang Yen Monastery for use of the facilities. There are additional small fees for days of mindfulness and retreats. Dana (donations) to our teacher is appreciated but not required. Students for whom this tuition is a financial burden should talk to a Dharma family leader.

BUDDHIST STUDIES CLASS

This course focuses on the core of the Buddha's teachings from a non-sectarian perspective. The spirit of the course emphasizes Dharma study as a support for personal practice, not as an academic curiosity.

The course was developed and is directed by Venerable Thich Tri Hoang. Monastic teachers and Buddhist scholars from different traditions are occasionally invited to teach a subject related to their tradition. Lay Dharma teachers provide assistance.

The course spans 3 years. The first year curriculum covers the life of the historical Buddha, his central teachings, and an introduction to the 3 main schools of Buddhism – Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana. The second year curriculum covers suttas and sutras in all 3 canons. The third year curriculum covers the Abhidamma, the Yogacara school, the Avatamsaka sutra, and the Bodhisattva Path. At the end of the 3 years, students who complete all requirements earn a certificate of Buddhist studies.

Students who earn a certificate of Buddhist studies may be invited by Thich Tri Hoang to participate in a fourth year of study and practice which prepares the student for becoming a lay Dharma teacher.

The class does not run all three years concurrently; at any given time, only one of the three years is being taught. Students are allowed to join at any time, however, an understanding of fundamental Buddhist beliefs and practices is necessary to benefit from the second and third year curricula.

REQUIREMENTS FOR STUDENTS NOT PURSUING A CERTIFICATE IN BUDDHIST STUDIES:

Attendance at all classes, days of mindfulness, and retreats.

Completion of all reading assignments.
Group presentation to the class of at least one book per year.
Participation in class discussion.
Service to the class (such as cleaning, bellmaster, preparing refreshments, etc.).

REQUIREMENTS FOR STUDENTS PURSUING A CERTIFICATE IN BUDDHIST STUDIES:

Attendance at all classes, days of mindfulness, and retreats.
Completion of all reading assignments.
Group presentation to the class of at least one book per year.
Participation in class discussion.
Service to the class (such as cleaning, bellmaster, preparing refreshments, etc.).
Written homeworks for each reading assignment.
A one-page written paper on the material missed during any class absence.
A final 5-page paper on an approved Dharma related topic.

DHARMA TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAM

As stated above, students who earn a certificate of Buddhist studies may be invited by Venerable Thich Tri Hoang to participate in a fourth year of study and practice which prepares the student for becoming a lay Dharma teacher. This year of personalized study and practice covers Buddhism applied to modern life, and focuses on opportunities and challenges in sharing Dharma. At the end of this fourth year, Venerable Thich Tri Hoang may invite the student to join the lay Dharma Teacher Order.

DHARMA FAMILIES:

In order to facilitate communication and learning among students, and between students and instructors, each student is grouped into one of several smaller Dharma families. Each Dharma family is led by a lay Dharma teacher or a senior Dharma student. Dharma families take turns with class duties such as set-up, cleaning, and snack preparation. Dharma families may also gather informally outside of class.

EXPECTATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is expected that students maintain a personal meditation practice. To facilitate this personal practice, it is expected that students participate in a local or on-line sangha or practice center. Students who need help finding a sangha or practice center can discuss this with their Dharma family leader. Recognizing that each person has a unique spiritual path, other practices that are recommended but not specifically required include vegetarianism, precepts recitation, listening to Dharma talks, and attending retreats outside of class.

READINGS:

The class covers approximately 6-8 books per year. No books are provided; all must be obtained by students. Most are available through online outlets such as Amazon.com. An effort is made to select relatively inexpensive books and to use free online publications whenever possible. Local libraries and book sharing among students are also encouraged.

ATTENDANCE:

Attendance at all classes, days of mindfulness, and retreats is required. Absences due to illness or unavoidable conflicts must be communicated to the appropriate Dharma family leader. A make-up assignment is required for students pursuing a certificate of Buddhist studies.

METHOD OF EVALUATION:

All students are evaluated in terms of their: 1) comprehension and communication of key concepts; 2) ability to present Dharma in written and spoken formats; 3) ability to listen and to contribute meaningfully and appropriately to class discussion; 4) service to the class; and, 5) class citizenship. Thich Tri Hoang is responsible for evaluation, in part based on input from Dharma family leaders who are assumed to have a closer relationship with their respective students.

COMMUNICATIONS:

The class maintains a webpage (www.dharmatraining.org) where students may find the schedule, the reading list and other files, and last minute changes to the schedule. There is also a listserv for announcements and for class discussion. Students registering for the class will be given access to the listserv.

DAYS OF MINDFULNESS AND RETREATS:

Each year includes several single days of mindfulness, as well as one 3-day retreat. These are also held at Chuang Yen Monastery, and students are encouraged to spend the night in Chuang Yen dormitories. These special times are dedicated to the practice of mindfulness and require the practice of noble silence and observation of the five precepts (preserving life, simple lifestyle, abstaining from sexual misconduct, loving and truthful communication, and healthy consumption (including abstaining from eating meat, drinking alcohol, and smoking).

ADDRESSING OUR VENERABLE TEACHER, OTHER MONASTICS, AND THE INSTRUCTORS:

Our teacher is Venerable Dr. Thich Tri Hoang. Because we are taking this class, it is appropriate to refer to him as "teacher" or "master." In Vietnamese, the word used is "Thay." This can be pronounced "Tay" or "Tie." It is also appropriate to call him "Venerable" or "Reverend."

There are a number of Chinese monks and nuns at Chuang Yen. In general, you may address all the monastics as "shifu" (SHIHfoo or SIHfoo). You may also use the title "Reverend." Two other monastics you may meet at Chuang Yen are the Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi and the Venerable Dhammadipa, the abbot of the monastery. They practice in the Theravadan tradition in which it is customary to use the title "Bhante", pronounced "BUNtay."

MINDFUL MANNERS

It is customary to greet or depart from monastics by putting your hands together and bowing your head, and bowing when they enter the room. When a monastic is speaking, we show respect by keeping our posture upright, focusing our minds on their teaching, and following our breath. We never interrupt our teacher by speaking or raising our hand while he is speaking.

Monastics live by an extensive set of rules, some of which govern appropriate behavior between males and females. In general, laypeople should not touch monastics of the opposite sex unless offered a hand for a handshake. Also, any personal conversations should take place somewhere that you may both be seen by others. Casual and comfortable clothing is fine, but please dress conservatively, wearing modest necklines, long pants/skirts, and long sleeved shirts.

Many of the spaces in the monastery contain statues of the Buddha or a bodhisattva. When you enter a room with a statue, it is respectful to bow toward it. In many Buddhist cultures, pointing is considered rude. If you need to gesture toward a statue or our teacher, do so with your hand open and palm facing up. Avoid pointing your feet toward our teacher or a statue.

To show respect for the Dharma and gratitude for our opportunity to study it, please treat Dharma books with care. Do not step on them or put a mug or plate on them.

GUIDELINES FOR CLASS PARTICIPATION AND COMPORMENT:

In addition to being a format for learning, the class is also a format for mindfulness practice.

One of the most important skills we can learn as a student of the Dharma is deep listening. Classtime is an opportunity to practice deep listening. When we listen to our teacher, our instructors, the presenters, or other students, we follow our breathing and focus our minds on what is being said. We do not interrupt and we do not raise our hand while someone is speaking. We do not use the speaker's time to formulate our own response.

We also use the classtime to practice mindful speech. We do not criticize, and we do not debate. It is polite to bow to the class before speaking and then again when we are finished speaking, to facilitate communication in the larger group and to help others to know when we are finished with our comments.

Students show respect for the teacher and presenters by refraining from eating and drinking during presentations and from getting up from their seats. There is a refreshment break during each class when it is appropriate to have a snack or a beverage and to use the restroom. Please do not do these things during class presentation time.

Students should move quickly and quietly from one class activity to another. The bellmaster will wait until all students are assembled before signaling the beginning of the next activity, so please show consideration for other students by taking your place on the meditation cushion, at the class tables, or in the walking meditation line with as little delay as possible.

Students should show respect for the teacher at all times. If he offers us guidance about our conduct, we should honor his request quickly and respectfully.

Students should sit quietly and attentively at the class table and keep the table clear of personal belongings (except class materials).