



Introduction to Buddhism: Suggested Reading List

Buddhism: A Concise Introduction

By Huston Smith & Philip Novak (HarperCollins Publishers, 2004)

This book is a great place to start studying Buddhism as it covers the Buddha's life, the developments of Buddhism over the millennia, and the adaptations as it comes to the West. Huston Smith is a master storyteller and makes the tradition come to life in his descriptions and explanations. This book is an expansion on the section on Buddhism from Huston Smith's book, *The World's Religions*, which is a classic in the study of religion and is also highly recommended.

The Four Noble Truths

By Ajahn Sumedho (Amaravati Buddhist Monastery)

This small booklet was compiled and edited from talks given by Ajahn Sumedho on the central teaching of the Buddha as they are expressed in the Four Noble Truths. Ajahn Sumedho is an American-born monk in the Thai Forest tradition of Ajahn Chah. Filled with humble and humorous stories from the author's own life, this book presents a pragmatic and clear explanation of the Four Noble Truths and also a first-hand account of what monastic life is like.

Mindfulness in Plain English

By Bhante Henepola Gunaratana (Wisdom Publications, 2002)

Bhante Gunaratana's classic "how to" manual on meditation covers key topics such as what meditation is and is not, the basics of how to get started with your meditation practice, and suggestions for overcoming common problems encountered during sitting. He also gives helpful advice on how to integrate your practice on the cushion into your everyday life. His voice is warm, humorous, and witty, with an approach that is accessible and clear.

Words of Wisdom: Beginning Buddhism (Vol. 1)

By Master Hsuan Hua (Buddhist Text Translation Society)

Words of Wisdom is a compilation of Dharma Talks given by Master Hsuan Hua on an assortment of topics ranging from what is Buddhism, the importance of cultivation, and the Bodhi resolve (the vow for enlightenment). Master Hua teaches in a way that is clear and straightforward, and although this book has the subtitle "Beginning Buddhism," the material presented goes to the heart of the Buddha's teachings on transcending the six paths of rebirth and realizing Buddhahood through benefiting all beings. As a teacher, Master Hua's presence inspired many people, Western and Asian alike, to see how the Dharma can transform one's life for the better.

The Chan Handbook

By Venerable Master Hsuan Hua (Buddhist Text Translation Society)

The Chan Handbook is based on excerpts from Master Hua's years of instructions on meditation practice to his students. The talks cover Chan/Zen meditation practices and general meditation techniques as well, and are organized in short digestible vignettes. They are presented in Master Hua's characteristically direct and down-to-earth style that is plain and conversational. This book is a good companion guide to meditation and should be supplemented with a more detailed guide, such as Bhante G's, "Mindfulness in Plain English."

What the Buddha Taught

By Venerable Walpola Rahula (Grove Press, 1974)

The Venerable Walpola Rahula's concise primer on the core teachings of Buddhism is clear, straightforward, and very informative, with numerous references to the canonical texts. The book explains and unpacks fundamental concepts such as the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, karma, and rebirth. Although it is on the dry and scholastic side, this book is an excellent introduction to Buddhism for beginners.

The Noble Eightfold Path

By Bhikkhu Bodhi (Pariyatti Publishing, 2000)

Bhikkhu Bodhi explains the Noble Eightfold Path in terms of both conceptual understanding and a framework of practice. He systematically guides you in how to approach these concepts and practices – for example, in understanding Right View or practicing Right Action – and provides the broader context for developing morality, concentration, and wisdom. The book is somewhat dense and not for complete beginners but is an immensely informative and helpful guide from a respected scholar monk.

The Sixth Patriarch's Dharma Jewel Platform Sutra

With the Commentary by Tripitaka Master Hua (Buddhist Text Translation Society)

This Sutra contains a record of the life and teachings of Great Master Hui-Neng who lived in China during the Tang Dynasty, and is for those who want to dive directly into the Chan (Zen) tradition. It is recommended that one has some understanding of Buddhism before studying this text. Master Hua's commentary takes the sometimes difficult principles and explains them in a simple manner to allow the text to take on another dimension where it is applicable to one's daily life.

Other Suggested Readings:

*Zen Flesh, Zen Bones. Paul Reps & Nyogen Senzaki (Compilers). Tuttle Co. 1957.

*The Foundations of Buddhism. Rupert Gethin. Oxford University Press, 1998.

*The World of Buddhism. Bechert, Heinz & Richard Gombrich (Editors). Thames and Hudson. 1984.

*Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction. Damien Keown. Oxford University Press, 1997.

Compiled by: Dharma Realm Buddhist Young Adults (www.drby.net), 2008