

Spring 2020 Arts of Asia Lecture Series
Visions of the Afterlife in Asia
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The Arts of Death and the Afterlife in South Asian Traditions

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Prince Siddhartha Gautama/ Shakyamuni Buddha (ca. 563/480 – ca. 483/400 BCE)

Gandhara: Region now in N.W. Pakistan/ N.E. Afghanistan where an early figural school of Buddhist art evolved displaying Western Classical characteristics (1st c. BCE-7th c. CE).

Pala Empire: E. India/ Bangladesh, 8th-12th c.

- **Nirvāna** (Sanskrit: “blowing out”/ “extinction”—i.e. of the self) the soteriological goal of Buddhism, it offers release from rebirths in *samsāra*. Enlightenment. Syn. *mokṣa*
- **Samsāra** (“wandering”) the continuous cycle of birth, suffering, death, rebirth.
- **Karma** (“action”) governs the circumstances of the next birth.
- **Dharma** “Law” of the universe/ nature of reality / how to attain *nirvāṇa/ mokṣa*.
- **Wheel of Samsāra / Bhāvachakra** “wheel of existence/ being,” symbolic representation of *samsāra*, with possible stations of existence.
- **Varadamudra:** Hand gesture indicating dispensing of boons.
- **Parinirvāna:** (“final nirvana”) the death of a buddha, after which he will not reincarnate.
- **Four Noble Truths:** The essence of Buddhism that the Buddha discovered upon enlightenment: the truth of suffering; the truth of the origin of suffering; the truth of the cessation of suffering; the truth of the path to the cessation of suffering.

1. The truth of suffering (Dukkha)
2. The truth of the origin of suffering (Samudāya)
3. The truth of the cessation of suffering (Nirodha)
4. The truth of the path to the cessation of suffering (Magga)

In the 4th Noble Truth, the Buddha describes the **Eightfold Path**, the prescription to achieve release from suffering (right view, right resolve, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right meditation)

- **Vajrayana Buddhism:** (“thunderbolt vehicle”): esoteric school of Buddhism that focuses on ritual, meditation, initiation. Also known as Tibetan Buddhism.

- **Jataka tales:** Stories of the Buddha’s previous lives.
- **Penden Lhamo:** Wrathful Vajrayana deity, protectress of the Gelug Order, Lhasa, and the Dali Lama.
- **Chöd:** (Tibetan: “to sever” also known as “Cutting Through the Ego,”) Vajrayana ritual to demolish the ego through rituals such as meditating on corpses and visualizing offering the body in a tantric feast to dissolve attachment to the body and understand emptiness. Emptiness is the ultimate wisdom of understanding that all things lack inherent existence. Implements made from human bones are often employed.
- **Thirthankara** (“Ford Crosser”)/ **Jina** (“Victor”): Enlightened ideals of the Jain faith. The 24th, Mahavira (early 6th c. BCE) is the most recent one.
- **Ahimsa** (“non-violence”) a fundamental goal of Jainism.
- **Yama:** Lord of Death/ Hell. His scribe is **Chitragupta.**
- **Karni** (*karma*) **bharni** (*Bharan*— “payment”): Late 19th/ early 20th c. chromolithographs depicting punishment for sins.
- **Yampat:** Bengali picture scroll depicting sins and various hells painted and performed by *patuas*.
- **Satī** (“Virtuous Woman”) Woman who self-immolates on her husband’s pyre.
- **Chhatrī** (“umbrella”) funerary memorial/ cenotaph

Suggestions for further reading:

Belli Bose, Melia. *Royal Umbrellas of Stone: Memory, Politics, and Public Identity in Rajput Funerary Art*. Leiden: Brill, 2015.

Harlan, Lindsey. *Religion and Rajput Women: The Ethic of Protection in Contemporary Narratives*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1991.

Pal, Pratapaditya, ed. *The Peaceful Liberators: Jain Art from India*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1994.

Pinney, Christopher. *Lessons from Hell: Printing and Punishment in India*. Mumbai: Marg, 2018.

Storm, Mary. *Head and Heart: Valour and Self-Sacrifice in the Art of India*. New Delhi: Routledge, 2013.