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### Buddhism 101: Spreading the word

By Susan Orr (Contact)  
Saturday, April 26, 2008

On an April evening at the University of Southern Indiana, classes are taking place in rooms around campus.

In a classroom in the basement of Rice Library, some 30 students are listening as a monk in a brown robe explains the fundamentals of Buddhism.

Tonight's lesson includes an explanation of karma. Thich Hang Dat's words, spoken with a strong Vietnamese accent, are often both simple and profound.

Buddhism describes a number of types of karma, but in essence karma means this: All actions have consequences.

If you lie to people, Dat says, you'll be mistrusted. If you treat others badly, you'll be disliked.

"If we want to look into the future, look at what we are doing now," Dat tells the group.

"When we have the proper understanding of karma, we would be careful of what we say, careful of what we do."

Buddhism was founded in the sixth century B.C. by an Indian man born as Siddhartha Gautama (later known as the Buddha). Buddhism teaches that life involves suffering, but one can overcome suffering by letting go of attachments and following the Noble Eightfold Path: right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right concentration and right mindfulness.

As a Buddhist, Dat is part of a tiny minority in the United States: According to The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life's recently released U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, only 0.7 percent of American adults self-identify as Buddhists.

But Dat is making his presence known in this region.

He lives at Ten Thousand Buddhas Summit Monastery, a Buddhist center he founded in Corydon, Ind., several years ago. He's also teaching introductory Buddhism classes at four schools this semester: USI, Indiana University-Southeast in New Albany, and Bellarmine University and the University of Louisville's Shelby Campus, both in Louisville, Ky.

Dat's path to Southern Indiana included a lot of stops



Serge Giachetti / Courier & Press Buddhist monk Thich Hang Dat teaches an introductory class on Buddhism at the University of Southern Indiana. Thirty-two students are enrolled in this semester's class. Dat, originally from Vietnam, runs monasteries in Corydon, Ind., and Louisville, Ky.



Thich Hang Dat teaches about reincarnation and the cycle of Samsara to students in his introductory class on Buddhism.

#### Buddhism Events

Buddhist monk Thich Hang Dat plans to teach Buddhism again at the University of Southern Indiana next fall. Dates and other details have not yet been set, but three classes are planned: Introduction to Buddhism 1, Introduction to Buddhism 2 and Meditation 101. The noncredit courses are part of USI's Extended Services program. Call 464-1989 or (800) 467-8600. Mindful Heart Buddha Sangha, 600 N. Weinbach Ave., Suite 960, holds meditation sessions at noon Wednesdays, 4 p.m. Saturdays, and 6 p.m. Thursdays and Sundays. Sessions are open to visitors, including beginners. Mindful Heart also offers occasional introductory and intermediate classes on

along the way.

He came to the United States as a teenager in the 1980s, and in 1990 he graduated from Penn State University with a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering. After that he moved to Ukiah, Calif., where he earned a master's degree in Buddhist studies from Dharma Realm Buddhist University and became a monk.

He then studied in India and Los Angeles, but found the hubbub of urban life didn't agree with him.

"I am not a city monk," Dat said.

Intending to establish a monastery in a more rural area, he checked out upstate South Carolina at the invitation of someone he knew. He spent a few months there and looked at more than 100 properties, but didn't find what he was looking for.

"The energy was not matching, so I could not stay there," he said.

Other people he knew suggested he look in the Kentucky/Indiana area. He came, liked what he saw, and purchased 80 acres in Corydon in 2001.

His monastery hosts weekly meditation sessions, monthly retreats and special celebrations several times a year. In March 2006, Dat opened a satellite center in Louisville which offers after-school programming, food relief and other activities.

This is the second time Dat has taught the class at USI. At 32 students, this semester's enrollment is more than double that of the first class.

Most of the students in this semester's class, Dat said, had some previous knowledge of Buddhism.

But he could not say whether interest in Buddhism is growing in this area.

"I hope so. I don't know. I don't know how to make that kind of judgment," Dat said.

Students in the noncredit course said they were drawn to the class for a variety of reasons.

Alan and Marie-Paule Marty of Newburgh became interested in Buddhism through their travels to Sri Lanka, India, Thailand, Borneo and Japan.

"We have suitcases full of literature, and it's usually filled with so many foreign terms that you kind of get bogged down," Alan Marty said.

Alan Marty, who attends the Unitarian Universalist Church of Evansville, said he sees similarities between Buddhism and Christian teachings. Both, he said, teach followers to treat others with kindness.

"There's all these parallels with Christianity and the moral life," he said.

Beth Franklin of Newburgh said she signed up for the class because she is a spiritual seeker.

"I don't believe there's just one way. I sort of believe it all, in a way," she said.

Franklin also holds a master's degree in counseling and has participated in 12-step recovery programs. Buddhism, she said, shares some ideas with both psychology and with addiction recovery. All three, she said, emphasize focusing on the present and being responsible for one's thoughts and actions.

"I think that's probably why Buddhism, at least on the surface," appeals to me," she said.

"I'm thrilled the classes are offered."

Buddhism. Classes are planned for next fall and winter, with dates to be announced.

The Sangha will have a retreat June 9-13 at Kordes Center in Ferdinand, Ind., with Buddhist monk Bhante Henepola Gunaratana. Cost is \$400 for a double room, \$475 for a single room. Participants should have meditation experience. Registration deadline: May 15. To register or for details, call 434-6643 or visit [www.mindfulheartbuddhasangha.com](http://www.mindfulheartbuddhasangha.com)

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**Posted by RickyBobby on April 26, 2008 at 10:53 a.m. (Suggest removal)**

"I don't believe there's just one way. I sort of believe it all, in a way," she said.

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man comes to the Father but by me."..... Sounds to me like only one way according to Jesus. Now if you've taken any type of philosophy class you may have heard of the law of non-contradiction. This basically means that its either a true statement or a false statement, it cant be both, there is no in between, (youre either pregnant or you're not, you drive a black car or you dont, youre married or your not... etc.) .....so basically one has to make the decision on whether or not they believe that statement to be true or false. Jesus either is the way, or he's not. So basically if one believes in more than one way to salvation, they are denouncing the claims of Jesus Christ to be the .Son of the living God and they only way to salvation. just my 2 cents..... :)

Bad news guys.....Oprah's wrong on this one. :)

**Posted by bdn2004 on April 26, 2008 at 7:53 p.m. (Suggest removal)**

RickyBobby is right. All religions in their true form exclude any other religion. You can't very well be reincarnated if you are living forever in heaven with God - or in that other place.

Unfortunately, our liberal churches have given the impression that that is not the case. I know a lot of so called Christians that could hardly tell you what testament the book of Job is in - much less be able to defend the faith against claims that two religions can be equally true.

The dumbing down of America is epidemic and I think it exists in our churches too.

**Posted by Spoilmygrandkids on April 26, 2008 at 8:28 p.m. (Suggest removal)**

Very good posts.

**Posted by Frank\_Bama on April 26, 2008 at 10:08 p.m. (Suggest removal)**

LOL @ term "liberal churches"

Why can't you people just be okay with letting other people believe what they want without trying to tell them HOW to believe or worship? Shouldn't you be more concerned with your own life?

Just my two cents.

**Posted by skeptic on April 27, 2008 at 8:33 a.m. (Suggest removal)**

"The dumbing down of America is epidemic and I think it exists in our churches too."

Thanks for making my point.

Belief and truth have nothing to do with each other. If you could show something to be true beyond a reasonable doubt, it wouldn't require faith.

**Posted by Warden on April 27, 2008 at 9:51 a.m. (Suggest removal)**

While I agree with the previous posters, and DO think the young lady misspoke what she meant to say, I think it is interesting studying other religions and cultures.

You don't have to believe what they say, to listen respectfully.

For skeptic: Belief is a truth you cannot put into words. (And, does not NEED to be spoken.)

Is it TRUTH that the sun will rise tomorrow, or just BELIEF? Sure, it has in the past - but that is anecdotal. There are very FEW PROVABLE TRUTHS.

**Posted by RickyBobby on April 28, 2008 at 8:06 a.m. (Suggest removal)**

Frank\_Bama, are you suggesting that i look at other people's beliefs and religions one way and not the other? what youre doing is just reiterating my point that it is one way and not the other, youre saying i have to look at this in a way that everyone is right instead of just one person being right, youre basically backing up my point of the law of non contradiction.

**Posted by eatmelamabluegill on April 30, 2008 at 1:04 a.m. (Suggest removal)**

How can you not like the Buddhists, such a wonderful people. I know of more than a few christians that could well benefit from a few Buddhist classes. I wish I would have know about his class, I would have tried to attend.

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