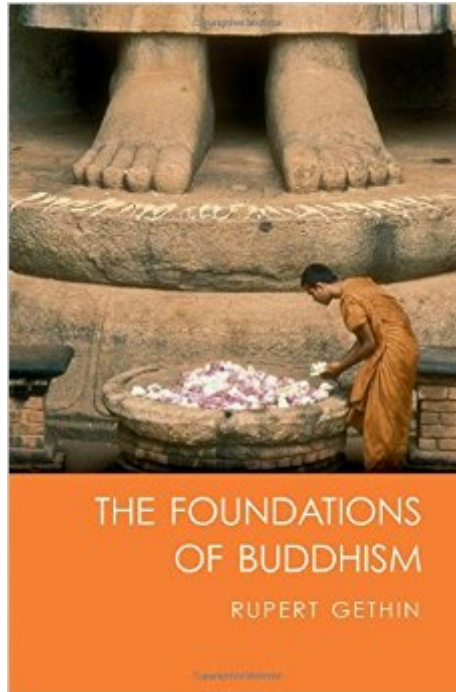


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The Foundations Of Buddhism (Opus S)



Synopsis

Buddhism is a vast and complex religious and philosophical tradition with a history that stretches over 2,500 years, and which is now followed by around 115 million people. In this introduction to the foundations of Buddhism, Rupert Gethin concentrates on the ideas and practices which constitute the common heritage of the different traditions of Buddhism (Thervada, Tibetan, and Eastern) that exist in the world today. From the narrative of the story of the Buddha, through discussions of aspects such as textual traditions, the framework of the Four Noble Truths, the interaction between the monastic and lay ways of life, the cosmology of karma and rebirth, and the path of the bodhisattva, this book provides a stimulating introduction to Buddhism as a religion and way of life.

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Customer Reviews

Having studied Buddhism privately and academically for over 20 years I usually consider introductory works not worth the bother. When I saw the outraged comments from the one-star reviewer below, however, I thought that this could be an interesting work. As another stated, most presentations of Buddhism that are made for Westerners are usually filtered to some extent, particularly older ones that are taking the

Buddhism-is-the-secular-religion-for-us-grown-up-Westerners routine. Unlike Mr. Martin, I own and have bothered to read many of the early Buddhist writings, and they are chock full of the kind of things he claims are not part of Buddhism. The author of this book takes it all on the chin and doesn't let it faze him a bit. He's more interested in telling about both the story and teachings of

Buddhism as they really were and, at core, still are, rather than keeping Western devotees comfortable. And what an introduction! Take all those 5 star reviews seriously. I was repeatedly impressed with the clarity of prose and vision Gethin demonstrates while explaining even some of the most difficult to grasp Buddhist philosophical concepts. Things that it took two hours for some of my teachers to communicate to the point that students actually understood are brilliantly explicated with delightful comprehension in just a few pages. It takes a real grasp of the field to pull this off, and Gethin does it over and over. Illuminating charts, penetrating text, and, thank goodness, a topical bibliography to mine for years...what more could you want? If you want to read a book that will leave you with a solid understanding of core, foundational, Buddhist concepts, instead of a fluffy semi-New Age ransacking of the tradition to pamper Western assumptions about the self and the cosmos, look no further. As soon as this is submitted, I am sending an email to the professor at the Buddhist college I attend to look at this work for inclusion in the texts for our introductory survey course. Peter Harvey's and Walpola Rahula's introductory works are both on the schedule already, along with a third that will go unnamed, which Gethin simply stomps into the dirt for value. "The Foundations of Buddhism" clearly belongs in such stellar company and hopefully this Fall will be benefiting students alongside them.

While I do not have the pedigree of Mr. Taylor (who wrote another 5 star review), I have read several hundred books on Buddhism, including all of the Nikayas, and I also took one graduate level course in a Buddhist Studies program, and I agree whole-heartedly with his comments. This book was one of the two main sources for the Buddhist Studies course, and to this day it is one of the handful of books to which I refer regularly. In fact, my copy is so worn out that I am about to order another one. If I were to teach an introductory course on Buddhism this would be the textbook. Unlike the 1 star review of Mr. Martin, I find this book wonderfully engaging and well-written. Occasionally I will pick it up to look up a fact, and find myself reading the next 20 pages. Mr. Gethin is also uniquely able to present the different traditions in an honest way without being disparaging about any of them. It is perhaps the fairest, most even-handed and factual account of the different traditions that I have read. I find this quite remarkable. I think that a fair reading of this text will let you appreciate the different schools of Buddhism, even if you don't necessarily buy into them. I think this book is a hidden gem. I wish that everyone with an interest in Buddhism could read - and appreciate (!) - this fine piece of work.

The Foundations of Buddhism presents an introduction to Buddhism as it really is, as seen through

the eyes of millions of its Asian followers, and not the cleaned-up atheistic Buddhism of latter-day "Western" converts. One reviewer thought that this book was a bad introduction to Buddhism simply because the author repeated the ancient Buddhist story of the Hindu gods paying homage to the Buddha at his birth! This merely reflects a largely "Western" bias. Belief in the existence of gods is not anathema to the so-called "real" or "original" teachings of the Buddha. Even Theravada Buddhism, the branch of Buddhism that is regarded as adhering most closely to the Buddha's original teachings, do not disclaim the existence of the Hindu gods. According to the Pali scriptures, the Buddha himself simply regarded them as irrelevant to mankind's salvation. Gods, like us, are caught in the web of samsara. They may occupy an exalted place in the current scheme of things, but they too will ultimately die (admittedly after a very long time) and be reborn (possibly on a lower plane of existence based on the law of karma, in accordance with their previous conduct), and die and be reborn, again and again. Thus, it is useless for mankind to blindly worship the gods in hopes of attaining salvation. Salvation in the form of Nirvana can only come from within - through our own renunciation of worldly desires. That is the main Buddhist message - Buddhism is simply not an atheistic philosophy that dismisses the existence of gods or other spiritual beings, contrary to what some "Westerners" seem to imply. In Mahayana Buddhism and to an even greater extent in Vajrayana Buddhism, spiritual beings of all sorts occupy virtually all spheres of existence. Buddhism is anything but atheistic. Just ask any Buddhist living in Asia.

There are many books on Buddhism but few do it justice. Peter Harvey's *An Introduction to Buddhism* and Lance Cousins' article in *A New Handbook of Living Religions* by Penguin represent some of the best overviews available in print in English. This book ranks at about the same level. It starts with the discovery of some of the bones of the historical Buddha and is enlighteningly sceptical about how much we can really know and state about the sources and the history of Buddhism. But it is written with feeling and provides an in depth study of major concepts and Buddhist cosmology. Dr Gethin practices Buddhist meditation and has written a very academic tome on the 37 factors of enlightenment. He writes with an open authority and this book "cannot be faulted".

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