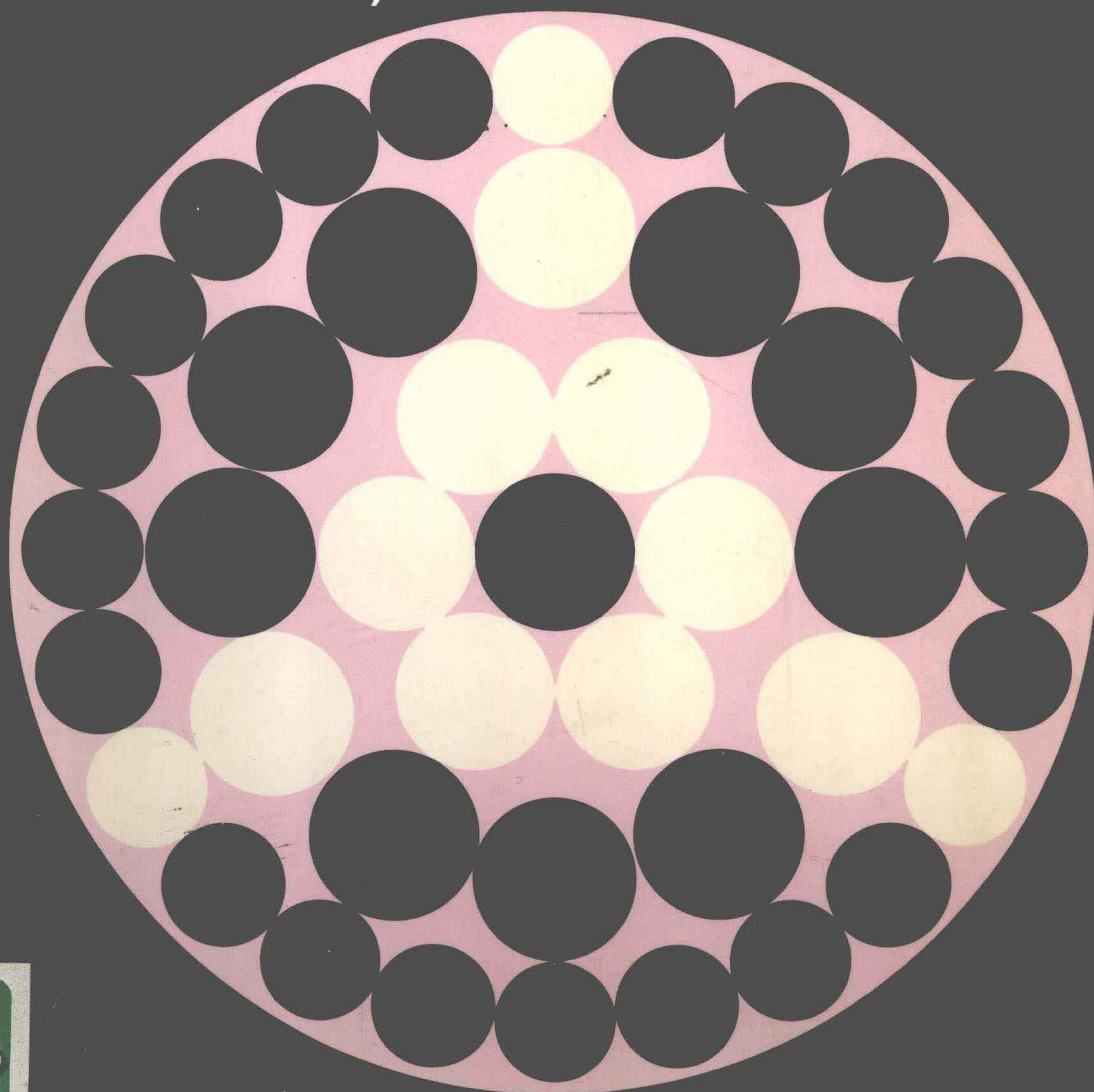


# The Buddhist Religion

A HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION  
THIRD EDITION

Richard H. Robinson  
Willard L. Johnson



THE RELIGIOUS LIFE OF MAN SERIES

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# *The Buddhist Religion*

## *A Historical Introduction*

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THIRD EDITION

Richard H. Robinson  
*formerly of*  
*University of Wisconsin*

Willard L. Johnson  
*Oberlin College*

*Assisted by*  
*Kathryn Tsai, Shinzen Young*

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# *The Buddhist Religion*

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*To Sītā and Neil,  
my daughter and my son,  
kuladuhitre ca kulaputrāya  
(RHR)*

*In this life, hate is never  
calmed by hatred,  
But by love.  
This is the primordial Dharma (sanātana-dhamma).  
Dhammapada  
(WLJ)*

*To Ven. Dr. Thích Thiên-ân, 1926–1980  
Supreme Patriarch of the Vietnamese  
Buddhists in America, Educator, Friend  
(KAT, SZY)*

## *Foreword*

THE RELIGIOUS LIFE OF MAN series is intended as an introduction to a large, complex field of inquiry—human religious experience. It seeks to present the depth and richness of religious concepts, forms of worship, spiritual practices, and social institutions found in the major religious traditions throughout the world.

As a specialist in the language and culture in which a religion is found, each author is able to illuminate the meanings of a religious perspective and practice as other human beings have experienced it. To communicate this meaning to readers who have had no special training in these cultures and religions, the authors have attempted to provide clear, nontechnical descriptions and interpretations of religious life.

Different interpretive approaches have been used, depending on the nature of the religious data; some religious expressions, for instance, lend themselves more to developmental studies and others more to topical studies. But this lack of a single interpretation may itself be instructive, for the experiences and practices regarded as religious in one culture may not be the most important in another.

THE RELIGIOUS LIFE OF MAN is concerned with, on the one hand, the variety of religious expressions found in different traditions and, on the other, the similarities in the structures of religious life. The various forms are interpreted in terms of their cultural context and historical continuity, demonstrating both the diverse expressions and the commonalities of religious traditions. Besides the single volumes on different religions, the series offers a core book on the study of religious meaning, which describes different study approaches and examines

several modes and structures of religious awareness. In addition, each book presents a list of materials for further reading, including translations of religious texts and detailed examinations of specific topics.

During a decade of use the series has experienced a wide readership. A continuing effort has been made to update the scholarship, simplify the organization of material, and clarify concepts through the publication of revised editions. The authors have been gratified with the response to their efforts to introduce people to various forms of religious life. We hope readers will also find these volumes "introductory" in the most significant sense: an introduction to a new perspective for understanding themselves and others.

*Frederick J. Streng*  
Series Editor



## *Preface to the Third Edition*

After scholarly review and extensive revision and augmentation, we produced this third edition with an eye to making the textbook easier to use and more interesting to the beginning student of the Buddhist religion. Limitations of space led us to cut many sections from the previous editions, while requirements for completeness led us to include many new sections and features. Further, we critically reviewed the entire work both before and after the revision.

Specific chapters and sections, especially in Part Two on Buddhism beyond India, have been revised extensively or expanded, including those on Theravāda and Tibetan Buddhism. Dr. Kathryn Tsai completely revised the chapter on East Asian Buddhism and added a new section on Central Asia in Buddhist history. Shinzen Young wrote an appendix on Buddhist meditation. We added much to the glossary, increased and diversified the bibliographic materials, and provided an analyzed index. The line drawings of the previous edition have been replaced in large part by photographs. There are also additional charts and diagrams and improved maps.

Many friends helped us in this task. We especially thank series editor Fred Streng for his surveillance of the entire project and for putting his editorial stamp on the work during final revision, and William Waller for his copy editing of the manuscript. Many others aided us, and they deserve our gratitude: Professors Ingrid Aall, Harvey Aronson, Jeffrey Hopkins, Charles Prebish, and Denis Sinor, along with Professors Jeffrey Broughton of California State University, Long Beach, James H. Foard of Arizona State University, G. W. Houston of Indiana University at Kokomo, F. Stanley Lusby of University of Tennessee, and

Donald K. Swearer of Swarthmore College, who reviewed the manuscript at various stages. Boris Er Witt, Richard Martin, Ruth Meserve and Hannah Robinson also contributed, while Sheryl Fullerton, religious studies editor for Wadsworth, oversaw the entire project. We thank all these who helped produce this book, as our debt to them is great.

Nonetheless, we remain solely responsible for this text. We ask all readers to excuse the remaining misleading statements, ill-founded ideas and interpretations, or other errors, and would like that comments or corrections be sent to us in care of the publisher. These will help us in preparing for the fourth edition. Personally, I (WLJ) thank Oberlin College for employing me during this revision, and my wife, Livia Diane Berg, for her assistance.

We thank the following individuals and organizations for contributing important visual materials to this work: Marilyn Britt, Harvey Aronson, the International Buddhist Meditation Center, the San Jose Buddhist Church, the Sino-American Buddhist Association, the Information Office of Vajradhatu (Boulder, Colorado), and the Zen Center of Los Angeles. We thank Boris Er Witt for permission to use photographs from the collection he made during 1966 and 1967 for his Survey of Buddhism in the U.S.A., sponsored by Dr. Kenneth Morgan of Colgate University. Finally, we thank the Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies of Indiana University (Bloomington, Indiana 47405); Distinguished Professor Denis Sinor, Director; Professor Stephen Halkovic, Assistant Director; and Ruth I. Meserve, photographer, for permission to use illustrations made from the Antoinette K. Gordon Collection of Tibetan Art, Professor Thubten J. Norbu, Curator, and from the Institute's manuscript collection.

*Willard L. Johnson*, Oberlin College

*Kathryn Tsai*, Vista, California

*Shinzen Young*, International Buddhist  
Meditation Center, Los Angeles

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## Note on Linguistics

Terms transliterated from foreign languages in this book often appear with diacritical marks. Occasionally, when a transliterated word may not be recognized and has an accepted English spelling, proper transliteration form is dropped (as Krishna for the more proper Kṛṣṇa).

The reason for diacritical marks is that only by using them can our orthography (writing system) closely approximate the original spelling of these foreign terms. For instance, the term *nirvana*, when spelled without diacritics indicating that the first *ā* is long and that the *ṇ* is retroflex (represented by the dot under the n), is not a close approximation of the original spelling of the term, since Sanskrit distinguishes long *ā* from short *a* and a retroflex *ṇ* from a dental *n*.

Buddhists have used many and quite diverse languages for canonical purposes, ranging from the north Indian languages of Sanskrit and one of its literary vernaculars, Pali (in which the oldest Buddhist Canon is preserved), to Chinese, Korean, and Japanese. To simplify matters this text uses Sanskrit so as to present the basic vocabulary of Buddhism in one of its original languages, although terms transliterated from other non-Indic languages also occur.

Though Pali was the first canonical language of Buddhism, all Indic words and names are given in their Sanskrit rather than their Pali form so that the beginning student will not have to learn two forms for each term. The few exceptions to this rule occur when a word has been left in Pali because it is misleading to use its less usual Sanskrit form. In such cases the word is either marked clearly as being Pali or is required by the context to be in its Pali form. Many words are identical in the two languages, for example: *Bodhi*, *Buddha*, *Māra*, *Piṭaka*, *Rāhula*, *samādhi*, *Śaṅgha*, *Tathāgata*, *Vinaya*. Common Sanskrit-Pali correspondences: *Abhidharma*—*Abhidhamma*, *arhant*—*arahant*, *bhikṣu*—*bhikkhu*, *bodhisattva*—*bodhisatta*, *dharma*—*dhamma*, *dhyāna*—*jhāna*, *Gautama*—*Gotama*, *Kauṇḍinya*—*Koṇḍañña*, *Kuśinagara*—*Kusināra*, *maitrī*—*mettā*, *Maitreya*—*Metteya*, *nirvāṇa*—*nibbāna*, *prajñā*—*pañña*, *Śakra*—*Sakka*, *Siddhārtha*—*Siddhattha*, *skandha*—*khandha*, *śramaṇa*—*samaṇa*, *sthavira*—*thera*, *Sūtra*—*Sutta*, *Udraka Rāmaputra*—*Uddaka Rāmaputta*, *viññāna*—*viññāna*, *yakṣa*—*yakkha*. Sanskrit /ś/ and /ṣ/ become Pali /s/—for example: *Aśoka*—*Asoka*, *Tuṣita*—*Tusita*.

## PART ONE

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# *The Buddhism of South Asia*



Buddhism arose out of early classical Indian civilization in the sixth century B.C.E. The first Indic culture existed during the Harappā period in the Indus Valley. It began around 2300 B.C.E. when a sophisticated urban life started to spread along the Indus River. About a thousand years later, bands of semi-barbarian nomadic cattle herders, the Indo-Aryans, began filtering into the Indus Valley, bringing an Indo-European culture and religious cult, an early form of Sanskrit, and a tripartite social system. These peoples absorbed what survived of the indigenous civilization. The resulting hybrid civilization gained in strength and creativity, moving into the subcontinent to overspread the Ganges River Valley.

These two religious traditions fed the classical cultural synthesis. Our knowledge of the religion of the Indus Valley is incomplete because its sparsely recorded language has remained undeciphered. More information exists about the Indo-Aryan religion, since it was recorded in the *Vedas* (manuals of ritual and religious knowledge, composed circa 1500 B.C.E. to 1000 B.C.E.). By 800 B.C.E., northern India was swept up in a period of spiritual efflorescence.

Out of this double heritage, India's major religious traditions came into being. First, rallied by the powerful charisma, image, and biography of the Buddha, a party of people of unorthodox religious persuasion organized itself. They became a *Śaṅgha*, or order of wandering monks and nuns—the first Buddhists. Second, reacting to this new spiritual precipitate, the orthodox Brahmanical traditions (of the *Upaniṣads* and the *Bhagavad Gītā*) gave rise to Hinduism.

Part I traces this development of Buddhism. Buddhism began with the enlightenment of the Buddha, which the tradition later retold in his biography as an epic transformation. Early Buddhist history saw the death of its founder (around 480 B.C.E.) and the establishment of its community, its standard Canon, and its common goal—to bring enlightenment to the world.

The tradition later divided into two major divisions, which separated the earlier Elders' traditions (the Hīnayāna) from the later Mahāyāna developments. The Elders' sects survived on the subcontinent until the end, and succeeded in transplanting themselves (in the Theravāda form) to Greater India (Southeast Asia, discussed in Part II). The Mahāyānists also created a vibrant religious life throughout India and found a home in Central and east Asia, and, in Tantric form, in Tibet as well.

Buddhism of both forms contributed to classical Indian religion, art, literature, and culture. Finally, about sixteen hundred years after its founder's death, Buddhism disappeared as a separate religious form within the Indic tradition, though it survived in the subsequent culture that it had influenced or originated.



