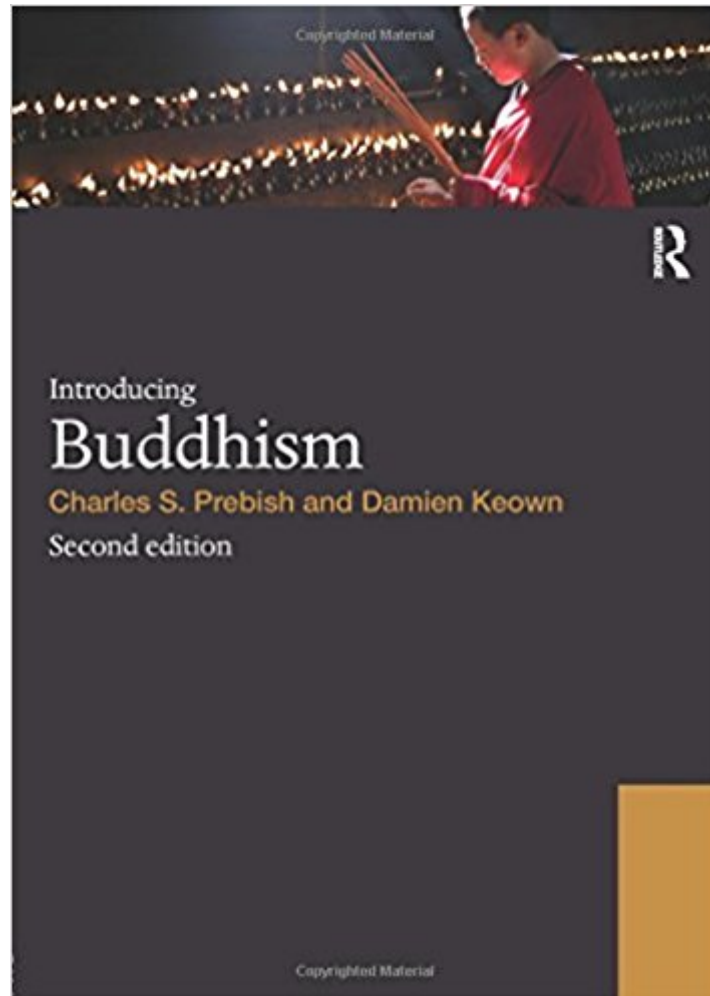




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# Introducing Buddhism (World Religions)



## Synopsis

Introducing Buddhism is the ideal resource for all students beginning the study of this fascinating religious tradition. It explains the religion's key teachings and traces its historical development and geographical spread of from its foundations up to present day. Charles S. Prebish and Damien Keown, two of today's leading Buddhist scholars, devote a chapter each to the major regions where Buddhism has flourished - India, South-east Asia, East Asia and Tibet. In addition, contemporary concerns are discussed, including important and relevant topics such as Engaged Buddhism, Buddhist Ethics, Buddhism and the Western World and Meditation. This new edition includes more material on the different schools of Buddhism including explanations in graphic form, monastic life, popular religion, Buddhist ethics, ritual, the Bodhisattva Path, the Jatakas, the transmission of Buddhism, and class, gender and race. Introducing Buddhism includes illustrations, extracts from original sources, summary boxes, questions for discussion, suggestions for further reading and a companion website at [www.routledge.com/textbooks/9780415550017](http://www.routledge.com/textbooks/9780415550017) Charles S. Prebish is Charles Redd Chair of Religious Studies at Utah State University. Damien Keown is Professor of Buddhist Ethics at Goldsmith's College, University of London. They are the editors of the Encyclopedia of Buddhism (Routledge, 2007).

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

'This is a wonderful book, comprehensive and readable, that covers a wide spectrum of Buddhism.

It's clearly presented and probably the best general textbook available today. Aimed at undergraduate readers, it can also provide reliable information for anyone interested in Buddhism.' - John Powers, Australian National University, Australia 'Well-structured, clearly written, and equipped with a variety of helpful didactic tools, *Introducing Buddhism* is an excellent starting point for studying the complex teachings and religious practices of Buddhism and its historical developments up to the present time. The book provides straightforward orientation for absolute beginners as well as more detailed discussions for advanced students. The first edition of the book has proved its worth in class, and I look forward to using this new, enhanced edition in my introductory classes.' - Oliver Freiburger, The University of Texas at Austin, USA

Charles S. Prebish is Charles Redd Chair in Religious Studies at Utah State University. Damien Keown is Professor of Buddhist Ethics at Goldsmiths College, University of London. They are the editors of the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Buddhism*.

Used this book in my upper division Buddhism class and loved it. It is very informative and I really enjoyed reading it.

I bought this book for a Buddhism class. The content is clear and straightforward though sometimes it was a bit dry to read (hence the four stars). It was a decent book for introduction to such an interesting and different religion.

Great item, Great Seller

What follows focuses on only one question, that of Buddhist origins. I have just received my copy of the paperback 2nd edition of *"Introducing Buddhism"* (2010) by Prebish and Keown, and am looking forward to working through it. Where I am coming from. Early this year i) I began again practicing 'mindful meditation', reading various Buddhist authors, also Thomas Keating, and ii) and started a rather freeform study of Buddhist origins and the story of its constant re-invention through the centuries down to what has been happening since it began having major impact in 'the West'; in Germany, France and England, and then in North America. (Way back when, its influence in China was such that there were Buddhist emperors; and in the process it went through a major reinvention). My own studies through many decades have been focused on trying to keep up with biblical scholarship, to which I added as a response to 9/11 a year's 'cram' on Islam, its origins and

historical development. Now, at this late stage of my life, I am ready to start a more focused study of Buddhism, using "Introducing" to follow its many reinventions but not, alas, to get a good grasp of its historical origins. Tags. Historical Methodology, Buddhism, Comparative Religion It is disappointing to see that, after four years of reviews and discussion, the flawed second chapter, entitled "The Buddha", has not been substantially reworked for this new edition. It makes a good start with the sentence, "The problems in uncovering traces of the 'historical Buddha' are similar to those faced in the search for the 'historical Jesus'", but then its 'downhill all the way'. Anyone who knows anything about the exemplary 'Quest', knows that you have to start with the historical sources that seem to give some access; that you cannot say anything about the historical figure until you have listed them, and carefully evaluated them. But here "Introducing" is skimpy in the extreme, with some further remarks scattered here and there in the text. (The same is true of other well-regarded English-language Introductions; which may say something about the current state of Buddhist studies in this country.) And this is all the more remarkable in view of the nature of the early sources. The consensus-- accepted by P. and K.--seems to be that the primary source for the Buddha, his life and teaching, is the so-called 'Pali Canon'. This collection runs for thousands of pages. (The ET got out by Pali Text Society fills 43 volumes). It apparently emerged--in what is today Sri Lanka--a few decades before the start of the Common Era, that is, about three hundred years after the death of the Buddha! What a challenge for historically-minded scholars, but apparently one that does not interest the present authors. The Pali language. This is recognized as a North India language, similar to what the Buddha would have spoken; or, rather, it is a somewhat artificial language resulting from the homogenous combination of several similar North Indian dialects. (Implication? Different part of the Canon were written in different dialects.) [A neat image has just floated into my head: Imagine Lord Templeton, or some other enlightened 'deep-pockets' guy, assembling a dozen leading Jesus questers for a surprise weekend--say somewhere high in the Rockies (all expenses paid); scholars from Germany, France, Russia etc-- as well as from North America. The Friday evening they are led into a conference room where they find all 43 vols. of the Pali Society's ET on the table, also a couple of experts--one of them perhaps Japanese. "Greetings, You have from now till Sunday afternoon to discuss the question of the earliest Buddhism sources, and the problems their utilization presents. You are being invited to serve as 'outside experts' and to come up with, a) an agreed list of eight or ten incisive remarks about the challenge facing scholars of Buddhism here, and b) a similar agreed list of the most important questions. If you fail to do so, you will be invited, but not obliged, to pay 20% of your expenses." While awaiting this potentially epoch-making event in contemporary religious scholarship, here are a few of my questions, which I hope will spur some of

you to come up with your own different or better ones. A. i) Is it established that the 'Pali Canon' is the earliest Buddhist writing (or at least the best preserved), or is it simply the earliest presently known to us? (Are there any early references to earlier ones?) ii) What is its textual history? How many early texts do we have? Can they be dated? How similar are they--any important differences? ii) How many current Buddhism scholars know the Pali language well enough to have simply read all 43 vols in Pali? [Tactless. See below.]\* iii) How many have done a thorough study that allows them to answer such questions as a) Is this body of writing fully coherent, or does it contain significant differences, whether obvious or subtle? b) Is there any evidence of other authors--perhaps 'disciples'--in addition to the original one? If there is, how much came from them, how much from him? iv) Through the modern era of Buddhist studies are there scholars (anywhere in the world) who have done such thorough studies? Could someone list them and outline and compare their major findings? v) What are the leading scholarly hypotheses concerning the original process between the Buddha and his disciples--possibly over many years--which enabled them (or special groups among) to learn this vast body of writing by heart? vi) What arguments have been made to establish that this vast body of oral tradition was faithfully maintained through several centuries? (Apparently the superb medieval 'Leningrad Codex' of the Hebrew Bible faithfully represents mss that were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls that date from 1000 or more years earlier. But a) here it is a question of faithful copying of writings and ii), other Dead Sea mss of some of the books differ significantly from the texts preserved so faithfully in the 'Leningrad'. The grounds for this choice?) Note: Many questions are suggested by the two densely-written pages on the Pali Canon that can be found in the Encyc. Britannica (printed and online). Hypothesis to play with. Asoka, the great Buddhist emperor of India who reigned for many years about half-way between the time of the Buddha and the beginning of the Common Era, is supposed i) to have founded Buddhist universities, and ii) to have sent missionaries in every direction, including a daughter and son to Sri Lanka: So perhaps he had written versions of the traditions made for these missionaries to take with them, lest the rigors of the journey affect their overloaded memories? Apparently the sources for Asoka are strong but limited. So, unless new ones emerge, there is no way to verify or deny this suggestion. For the rest, I am looking forward to using "Introducing" for the historical developments, the creative re-inventions down to the present, of which it is a part. \*Tactless. I can still remember the day at a meeting of North American 'Questers' when one distinguished scholar whispered to me, "You know, most of these guys are essentially NT scholars with a good knowledge of the sources but, unfortunately, little or no knowledge of Aramaic and Hebrew, and so they are insufficiently familiar with Jesus' cultural context, late 2nd Temple Judaism. Contrast two great

Jewish admirers of the Jewish Jesus, Geza Vermes (emeritus at Oxford) and the late David Flusser of Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

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